

THE
CITY
By John Strange, M. A. & C. E.





(English Fiction)

"GRIP!"

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GRIP

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER



Stannard, Henrietta Eliza Vaughn

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GRIP!"

CHAPTER I.

BLACK COAT OR RED?

I HAD been round to the stables after dinner to see if Joe, the under-groom, had been successful in getting hold of a ferret of which I was particularly anxious to possess myself at a reasonable price. No sign of Joe was to be found, and I sauntered back to the house again, and sat down under the veranda which ran along the side of the house where the dining-room was. I could hear my father's voice as he sat over his wine with his great friend and our nearest neighbor, Squire Eden. I had no intention of listening to their conversation, but we Somerses were not a family who dealt in

Grip

secrets and seldom or never took the trouble to lower our voices.

“Yes, Eden,” my father was saying, “I know the living is yours by rights ; that was why I gave it to your brother Tom. But now that he is gone, poor fellow, I mean to put in a warming-pan and keep it for George.”

“But why don’t you give Somersley to George ?” Squire Eden asked. “You’ve got a warming-pan there, too.”

“I am going to give it to George,” said my father, quietly.

Squire Eden gave a low whistle of astonishment. “Whew ! I see that you mean to provide for the lad well—and easily,” he remarked, significantly. “They must be worth a cool thousand a year between them.”

“See here,” said my father, as if a bright idea had occurred to him. “My George and your Margaret have been sweethearts ever since they could toddle. They shall marry and live at Somersley. ’Tis the best house of the two, and they can put a curate in at Thorpe-Hutton.”

Black Coat or Red

"Agreed," cried the Squire, "if so be that the young folk themselves are agreeable."

I slipped out of hearing. I was but a lad of sixteen, but all my pulses were tingling and my blood coursing through my veins at double-quick speed. With pleasure? Oh, dear, no; but, on the contrary, with anger and fury and disgust. Was I, for the sake of a paltry thousand a year, no matter whether it happened to be warm or cool, to be stuck into a parson's black coat and kept psalm-singing all my days, when my sole aim and object in life was to wear the scarlet of the soldier and to carve my name indelibly upon the great roll of fame? And all for the sake of a mere girl—Pooh, it was preposterous! It was true that we had been reckoned sweethearts all our lives, but to become a parson for Margaret's sake—why, that was quite another matter.

I was very fond of Margaret—oh, yes, and I admired her dainty peach-bloom face, but to be a parson—a parson! That was a different thing altogether.

Besides, Margaret was such a mite, four years younger than I, and small and slight

Grip

at that. It was preposterous for our fathers to try to settle any such question.

Margaret was the eldest of the Eden family. Then came Edward, the heir, a cocky young beggar two years younger, who always seemed to have his elbows or knees out. The second girl, Constance, was three years younger than Edward, and the other boy was four years younger still.

In our household there were two brothers and two sisters older than I and one boy younger—the little Benjamin we always called him, though his right name was Wynne, after my mother's family.

At this time my eldest brother Robert was in the Guards; then came Will, a dear old chap, in London reading for the Bar. Then the two girls, Lucy and Rachel, twins of three-and-twenty, both rather pretty girls of a reddish type. Young Wynne was only thirteen years old.

We were all reddish, we Somerses; and, with the exception of Wynne, who came into the world as our mother left it, we all ran to size—not mere length of limb, but to breadth of shoulder and depth of chest, and

Black Coat or Red

to immense strength of person and constitution. And I had fully made up my mind that no black coat should ever case in my longings.

I had hard work to make my father see things in the same light : he was as determined as I was. But I said my say.

“ I am very sorry to go against you, Sir Robert,” I said bluntly—we all called our father “ Sir Robert,” more by way of showing our affection than anything else—“ but I cannot be a parson. The people would laugh in my face. The farmers would remember the apples I had stolen, and the rat-hunts and the cock-fights I had joined in. I must be a soldier.”

“ I cannot afford another soldier,” said my father.

“ You are thinking of Bob ! ” I exclaimed. “ Oh, I’ve no wish to be a fine gentleman dandy soldier like Bob.”

My father burst out laughing. “ You had better not let Bob hear you speaking of him in such fashion as that,” he said chuckling. “ Gad, he’d crack your skull for you, I warrant.”

Grip

“I can’t help it, Sir Robert,” I said desperately. “I want to be a soldier—I will be a soldier.”

“And what about the two livings—I meant them for you?”

“I can’t help it. Give them to Wynne. He is delicate, and could never rough it. He will be far happier at Somersley Rectory than ever I should be. Give them to Wynne.”

“I will speak to him. I cannot force Wynne one way or another,” said my father, shortly.

The result of this conversation was that my father held a consultation with Wynne, who, young as he was, had a wise little head on his shoulders, and saw the sense of things as if he had been twice his age. And Wynne consented to make the two livings of Somersley safe.

All the same, I was not a little uneasy in my mind, fearing that Wynne had been sacrificed for me and I sounded him on the subject. His answer reassured me. “Dear old George,” he said—Wynne had always loved me beyond the ordinary ways

Black Coat or Red

of brothers from his babyhood—"I don't think I would have chosen to be a parson; I wanted to be an artist—and paint pictures and go to Rome. But Sir Robert is anxious about the livings, and I don't mind. You want to be a soldier. I'll be the parson."

So I had my way, and my father purchased for me a commission as ensign in the 136th Foot—the Regent's Own. I was a soldier in spite of everything.

The life that I led for three years after I entered the Army does not in any way concern the story. It suited me to a nicety. I loved my work and was popular among my fellows. I was a strong favorite with the men of my company, chiefly because I was good at every kind of sport, could drink without showing it, and was blessed with plenty of the real old Yorkshire pluck, which was my birthright. A good many lads from the neighborhood of Somersley chose to follow my fortunes by enlisting in the 136th, and they, not a little to the amusement of my brother officers, persisted in calling me "Mr. Garge," just as they had done in the days of my boyhood, when

Grip

we had raided the orchards of the neighborhood together, or engaged in other distractions equally common to all sorts and conditions of boys living in the depths of the country. And my name in the regiment was "the Bulldog."

The first time that I went home after I joined was just a year from the time of my first setting out into the world. I was bigger and redder than ever, and my father looked my inches over in intensest admiration.

"Well, Sir Robert?" I said at last.

"You're no beauty, my boy," said he, drawing a deep breath; "but I think you're the finest fellow I ever saw. I'm proud of you, George. I'm glad you chose to be a soldier—'twould have been a pity to waste so much bone and muscle in the pulpit."

So I was well satisfied with my lot.

The following year I did not go home at all, pleading the expense of the long journey as my excuse, for we were quartered in Ireland. When time for my long leave came round again Sir Robert wrote himself saying that he hoped my Irish invitations would

Black Coat or Red

not blot out the fact from my memory that I had a home in Yorkshire ; also, he added, as my sister Lucy had arranged her wedding to take place in November, he begged I would be there for it.

So I went home. I was then nearly of age, and I do believe that I was bigger and broader and stronger and redder than ever !

“ Why, Mr. Garge,” said the old head-keeper to me, “ you do grow, to be sure ; you’re like t’ side of a hoose.”

“ Then you don’t think I’ve grown pretty, William,” I remarked, jokingly.

The sturdy old chap shook his head — “ Nay—nay, Mr. Garge,” he replied, with the literal bluntness of a true Yorkshireman ; “ if beauty’s a sin, ye’ve none to answer till.”

And he was quite right—I was uglier than ever ! Still, beauty or no beauty, my want of looks did not prevent me from falling in love. I saw Margaret Eden at my sister’s wedding for the first time since I had gone into the Service, and if I had not grown in beauty Margaret had not been idle in that way. I saw—and I was conquered.

Grip

I realized before the bride and groom had gone off on their honeymoon journey that Margaret Eden was my fate—she was perfection !

Well, I was young, well-born, and a soldier. It was true that I had in my younger days flung away the chance of being Margaret's husband with all the lavish prodigality of youth. I had refused the two good family livings which were at my disposal, and it would be years before I should ever make enough to compensate for them. Still, I should have a modest fortune under my mother's marriage settlement, for she had been well dowered as well as beautiful. And I had also another chance of inheritance from my mother's sister, who was my godmother and unmarried, and she, being well off, might be expected to do something for me when she should have no further need of her money.

I have none but a very dim remembrance of my mother, and, somehow, I never liked to ask Sir Robert whether she had at all resembled my Aunt Eliza in person—the very thought seemed like a sacrilege. And

Black Coat or Red

yet Aunt Eliza was kindness itself in her way to us, and—and—I don't know that she was any more queer to look at than most other ladies of her age who did not wear their own hair and spent all their evenings and most of their afternoons playing whist for sixpenny points.

“Bless me, Robert,” I remember her saying one day to my father as she stood by the library table watching him write a letter —“bless me, Robert, your hair's as gray as a badger,” and she ruffled his curly locks as if he had been a child.

My father hated to have his hair touched, and he recoiled from her invading hand with a look of deepest annoyance. “I daresay it is, ma'am,” he replied with acidity—“and I wonder what color yours is, if one could see it.”

“Your poor father is getting very touchy,” said Aunt Eliza to me afterwards, in a pitying tone. “I am very sorry to see it—it's such a bad sign in an elderly man.”

They often sparred like this, but it never went any farther, perhaps because Sir Robert remembered that we at Somersley were not

Grip

the only nieces and nephews the good lady possessed. But of all I was her special favorite, and I saw with satisfaction that she regarded Margaret Eden with no small amount of favor. Several times she descended to me on her charms and always in contradistinction to my two sisters, whose inches and bonniness were a source of great trouble to her.

"Nice good girls, your sisters," she said to me the day after my arrival at home, "but I must confess I like something more genteel and ladylike—something less aggressively robust. Now Margaret Eden is—" and there Aunt Eliza paused and looked at me.

And when the next day I saw Margaret I was fain to confess that she was—well, perfection.

It came back to me in a moment that I had always thought her so, that we had always been sweethearts, that she was the only human being in all the world for whom I had ever felt a spark of real romantic passion. She was my fate!

How curiously things fall out! I fancy

Black Coat or Red

that, if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, Margaret would have been kept very carefully out of my way, and that I should never have been given the chance of making any impression upon her. But, as it happened, the Squire and Mrs. Eden were called to London by the serious illness of Mrs. Eden's mother, and Margaret was left practically mistress of the household. Of course there was the old nurse, Goody, who had been in the family for forty years, but her time was pretty well taken up with a new baby, and she did not count for much or prove any check upon my frequent visits.

I don't know that I should have gone over to Thorpe-Hutton quite so often had Mrs. Eden been at home, but, as it was, I made the best of my time and blessed the considerateness of the old lady in London who had so opportunely fallen ill, though I wished her all in good time a happy issue to her troubles. Poor old lady! She did get through them to a happy issue in the end, though not quite the one that I had had in view—for she died when I had

Grip

been at home nearly a month and the Eden family was plunged into deep mourning.

I was sorry to hear that the poor old lady was gone, but still her death gave me a fortnight's grace, for the Squire and Mrs. Eden had to stay in London to see to the funeral and arrange her affairs, or at least set them in train for settlement, before they could think of returning home.

But at last, just as my leave was drawing to a close, and my time was getting short, the news came, sent on from York by a special messenger, that they would be at home the following day! This intelligence, though not unexpected, came on me like a thunder-clap.

“Margaret!” I said, speaking in a great hurry, “I must speak; I can't hold my peace any longer. Margaret, love, darling, sweetheart of my childhood, say is there any chance for me, any hope? I love you, Margaret; I love you distractedly, devotedly; I love you forever.”

Vain Regret

CHAPTER II.

VAIN REGRET.

“MARGARET, your answer?” I cried.

She looked half shyly; half doubtfully, from under her dark lashes. “Dear old George!” she said, softly,

“But what does ‘Dear old George’ mean?” I said. “Margaret, don’t keep me in suspense.”

“I don’t know what to say,” she murmured.

“Say ‘yes,’ ” I urged.

“But I cannot do that. I don’t know what father and mamma would say. I’m afraid they will think we are too young for one thing, and—and——”

“But you don’t think that we’re too young, Margaret?” I cried, almost beside myself at the very hint of opposition.

“I—I——”

Grip

"Oh, Margaret—Margaret—if you love me as I love you," I burst out, passionately—and then I lost my head and caught hold of her again. "Margaret, you do love me?"

She looked coyly down. "I've always loved you, George," she said. Then qualified the assertion by adding—"all of you."

"Never mind the others," I cried, desperately. "I only want to know what *you* feel for *me*. Margaret, speak."

"I don't know what to say," she whispered.

"I'll teach you then," I answered. "See, you don't say a word—but—but—you look at me and—and—" *and Margaret kissed me.*

I felt that those kisses had sanctified my love, that they had given her to me, that our betrothal was as solemn as if we had stood to exchange vows before the table in Thorpe-Hutton church. I looked straight into her half-frightened eyes and kissed her again.

"Dearest," I said, gently, "I am yours to do with as you will from now to eternity.

Vain Regret

I love you. Body and soul I belong to you and you to me. I daresay your father and mother may think us young and improvident. I suppose we are both in truth. And yet—yet—if we love one another, what do such details, such mere circumstances as money and provision matter against the glory of our love?"

"I am afraid that father and mamma will think so," she said doubtfully.

That evening after dinner I told my father what had happened.

"Well, young man," he exclaimed, "you've put your foot in it properly."

"Not at all, Sir Robert," I returned, rather shortly. "I have done the best thing for myself that I possibly could do."

"For yourself—yes! But Squire Eden will naturally ask whether you have done the best thing possible for Margaret?"

His remark seemed to pull me up short, as if I were a hound that had strayed too far from his tether, and I had been pulled up with a jerk. "I don't see—" I began, but my father interrupted me.

"My dear lad," he said, "you never do

Grip

see anything but what happens exactly to suit yourself just at the moment. Now, it's ten chances to one that Squire Eden will think and say that the marriage or even an engagement is quite out of the question; and if he does, I must warn you that although you are my son I shall uphold him. However, if you manage to bring the affair to a successful issue, I shall be ready with a hearty welcome. Here's to your health and hers, my lad, and good luck to you."

The following day I rode over to Thorpe-Hutton, and, giving my horse into the hands of one of the grooms, went indoors, and asked for the Squire.

The servant showed me into the Squire's study—a little room where he kept his guns and fishing-rods and attended to business matters.

"Ah, George, my dear lad!" was his greeting to me. "Are you at home again? It seems years since I saw you. What a fine, strapping fellow you've grown!"

"I am glad you think so, sir," I replied. "I hope you are well—and Mrs. Eden?"

Vain Regret

“As well as can be,” he replied.

“I daresay you are surprised to see me so soon after your arrival, sir,” I began—“but the truth is, I felt I could not come too soon. I have come to ask you for Margaret.”

“For Margaret?” he repeated, evidently not having fully taken in my meaning.

“Margaret and I want to be married, sir,” I explained.

He looked up in a startled kind of way.

“To be married!” he echoed. “You and Margaret? Oh, nonsense!”

“Not nonsense at all, sir,” I said with dignity.

“You and Margaret! But—but—she’s a mere child—barely out of the schoolroom.”

“Close on seventeen,” I put in.

“Yes; but what’s that? A mere child. And you, George, you are not of age yet. Oh! come back again in five years’ time and we’ll think about it!”

“But we want you to think about it now.”

“Oh! do you? Have you told your father?”

“Yes, sir.”

Grip

“And he is willing?”

“Perfectly; if so be that it is not displeasing to you—and Mrs. Eden.”

“Is he going to increase your allowance?”

“We did not speak of that.”

“H’m! Well, my dear George, I should say that your father will not be inclined to think of it either. I have been in London, my dear boy, for a few weeks, and I don’t as a rule walk about with my eyes shut.”

“I don’t understand you, sir,” I said.

“You have a brother in the Guards,” he said, more significantly; “and Bob is going the pace up there with all the other young bloods of his set. I don’t think your father will feel himself at all inclined to increase your allowance even by half. Let me see—you have——?” He broke off and looked at me questioningly.

“Two hundred and fifty a year,” I replied, and surely never had the sum seemed so modest to me before.

“And you have debts?”

“I am not what could reasonably be called ‘in debt,’ sir,” I replied a little hotly.

Vain Regret

“No—no; I am not trying to cast aspersions on you,” he said, soothingly. “But still, there are various odds and ends which will have to be settled sooner or later—say a hundred to a hundred and fifty, hey?”

“Thereabouts,” I admitted; and I felt as if the ground were gradually slipping away from under my feet.

“Yes, I thought so—a mere trifle, a hundred and fifty or two hundred—like all the other young bloods. Still, it will have to be paid—and so will Bob’s few thousands that he is throwing right and left like water. And so I am afraid that any idea of a marriage between you and Margaret is altogether out of the question for the present—for the present, at all events,” he ended, with emphasis.

I was silent for a minute or two trying hard to gulp down my disappointment and chagrin. At last, however, I ventured to trust my voice.

“Squire,” I said, and I felt as if all the blood in my body had rushed into my face and was seething and boiling in my ears, “I have known you all my life and I must

Grip

be above-board and honest with you. I mean to have Margaret for my wife. You know the Somers' motto, 'Grip.' You know the Somers' character for hanging on. They call me 'the bulldog' in my regiment. I mean to have Margaret. I've been careless and I have a few paltry debts—I'll pay 'em, so help me God! But I'll have Margaret. I've set my heart and soul on her. She loves me! That's enough for me."

He looked up at me in astonishment, then rose slowly from his chair at the table and came close up to where I was standing. "D——n it, my lad!" he exclaimed, "you're the finest Somers of them all. Give me your hand. I hope that you will get through and that my little maid will be true to you. But you must prove your fine words and show what stuff you are made of."

He held out his hand and gripped mine hard, then broke out almost irritably, "Now, why the devil couldn't you follow the course your father and I marked out for you, and qualify for the two rectories?"

Vain Regret

"Because I was too young to know my own mind," I replied. "Sir Robert knew what was best. He ought to have left me no choice in a matter so serious."

"Nay, lad," cried the Squire, "your father was right in the main and you were hard set on having your own way. Never cast it back at him, however things happen to turn out. I mind me how my poor mother used to say time and again: 'What is, is best.' It's a rare useful saying. Keep it in your heart, boy."

"But about Margaret?" I asked.

"Well, my lad, pay off your few bits of debts—it will only mean a little self-denial—and then come to me again and we'll talk it over in a different light. But the maid must be free, mind—free as air."

CHAPTER III.

AUNT ELIZA SAYS TWO WORDS.

I HAD but a few days of leave left ere I had to say good-bye to my sweet-heart and make the long journey back to Ireland and my regiment.

Margaret promised very tearfully that she would be true, and her mother impressed upon me her opinion that if I really loved her with all my heart I should best show it by not coming back until my debts were paid to the uttermost farthing. And the Squire thumped me on the back and dismissed me, with a few cut-and-dried choice old maxims to carry me on my way —“‘A pin a day is a groat a year,’ says poor Richard ;” “Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves ;” “A penny saved is a penny earned” —and other such scraps of cheese-paring information ; but of promises I had none,

Aunt Eliza Says Two Words

excepting that one little tearful promise of Margaret's, which, as soon as my back was turned, her kinsfolk might try all in their power to nullify.

Well, I had made my bed, and I knew that I must lie on it. I had done my best to retrieve my blunder in letting the chance of Somersley Rectory slip through my fingers. I regretted it heart and soul—aye, heart and soul! Not that I felt myself the better qualified for orders than I had done five years before. No, no; but I was in love, overwhelmingly, desperately, mad-deningly in love, and I would willingly have turned chimney-sweep if by so doing I could advance my cause.

I did not hear from my sweetheart until I had written three times to her. Then I received a shy little letter, as coy as my darling's eyes.

“Mamma thinks,” she said in the course of it, “that you are extremely extravagant to write so frequently, and bids me say so. Mamma desires to be kindly and affectionately remembered to you, and bids me also say that in her opinion once in three months

Grip

is quite often enough to write, particularly as you had not troubled to get your letters franked!

“We purpose, as I daresay you will be much surprised to hear, removing to London in a fortnight’s time, so as to spend the main part of the season there. We are still in somewhat deep mourning, but it was my dear grandmamma’s especial desire that I should be presented at Court before my eighteenth birthday, the same as my mamma was. We are going to take up our abode in grandmamma’s house in Chesterfield Square, she having left it to mamma for the purpose. I did not know when we parted that dear grandmamma had left me her suite of pearls with a wish expressed that I should wear them for my presentation and on my wedding-day. They are very fine and worth a large sum. Mamma says I am to regard them as an heirloom.

“I hope you are well, dear George, and working hard. My father and Constance and my brothers desire to be kindly remembered to you, and I subscribe myself your affectionate and sincere Margaret Eden.”

Aunt Eliza Says Two Words

It was a dear little letter, and yet, when I read it over a second time, I felt that its simplicity was not so real as seemed upon the first blush! So they were going to London while I was grinding away at soldiering in Ireland, and while I was saving every halfpenny, and keeping religiously out of the way of the blue-eyed Irish beauties, the Edens were launching out, and my Margaret was to be introduced, against all the prevailing notion of etiquette, into the gay world of fashion.

The Somerses had never shone as letter-writers, so that I never looked for much news from home. I did have a long letter about this time from my sister Rachel, which I read with amazement.

“Our neighbors, the Edens, are on the eve of departure for London, and I hear great accounts of the gay doings in which they expect to participate. Doubtless, however, my dear brother, you have all this news at first-hand, so I will not fill my paper with what would be a repetition. They say that old Lady Maria left Mrs. Eden a fortune of one hundred and fifty

Grip

thousand pounds, and certainly their lately increased expenditure does not seem inconsistent therewith. One would not have credited her ladyship with the possession of as many pence."

So that was the meaning of the journey to London—the Edens were going to launch forth. And Lady Maria had left one hundred and fifty thousand pounds to her daughter! That was news indeed, and yet it gave me no pleasure. For it was plain that had they meant me to be their daughter's husband they would never have allowed a paltry couple of hundred pounds to stand so determinedly in the way. No; it had been but a ruse to gain time, so that they could keep me quiet in Ireland, and give my Margaret every chance of making a more eligible alliance.

I wrote several times to Margaret at the address in Chesterfield Square, but without success of reply. And then, just as I was beginning to have wild thoughts of going over to London to find out what was going on, a letter came—and the blow fell.

It was as I expected. She wrote herself,

Aunt Eliza Says Two Words

but I recognized the true spirit of Lady Maria's daughter in every line:—

“DEAR GEORGE,—Mamma and I feel that it is due to you that I should write to you at once, to tell you of a great change that has taken place in my life. I am engaged to be married to the Comte Desmond de Lancy—a French nobleman of very old family, who has been for two years past at the French Embassy here, but who is now on the point of leaving and returning to his own country. You will be surprised that I am going to marry a Frenchman, but the Comte's mother was an English lady, a cousin of Lord Pierpoint's, and his sympathies have always been English. I believe that he is considered too sympathetic to England to remain longer in an important diplomatic position. We are to be married in about two months' time, and will live mostly in Paris, or on Comte de Lancy's estate on the Rhone. He is very rich.

“I hope, my dear George, that you will be content to know that I am happy, and that our boy and girl *affaire de cœur* will

Grip

not be inconsistent with a lifelong friendship. I have already received your father's congratulations, as he is in London, and was here taking dinner yesterday."

So they had carried their point, and the sacrifice was one stage further towards completion! I rose up in a fury and sought out my commanding officer, and to him I preferred my request for leave of absence in a voice which trembled so much that my lips could scarce frame the words.

"Is anything serious the matter?" he asked, looking at me in amazement. "Have you bad news?"

"Yes, sir, very bad news," I replied.

"I hope your father is not dead?" he said, kindly.

I could not command myself to speak for a minute or so. "It strikes nearer home than that, sir," I said.

"As how?"

"They are going to sell my sweetheart to a beast of a Frenchman," I burst out.

It was enough! He signed the paper,

Aunt Eliza Says Two Words

and an hour later I set out for England and London.

By dint of travelling day and night, I arrived in London within a week of receiving the fatal news. I repaired straight to the house of my Aunt Eliza, which was in a street of tall houses just off Russell Square. I found her on the point of sitting down to breakfast, it being hard on the hour of nine. She got up in a great hurry when she saw me, calling out, "Why, George—is that you? Is aught amiss?"

I told her all. I told her the story from the beginning to the end, and wound up, "Aunt Eliza, I'm your godson, and my mother was your favorite sister. I've never traded on it. I've never asked you for a shilling in my life. But will you help me now? I've paid off thirty pounds of my few debts since I was at home last year. Will you help me, so that I may go boldly and say 'I am free,' and claim my bride?"

My aunt's comment on this was brief enough. "Little hussy!" she said, sharply.

"'Tis none of her doing," I cried, indignantly.

Grip

“Perhaps not,” she said, dryly. “But I’ll see you righted, George, so far as the money goes. You’ve come to me fair and straight: and, as you say, ‘tis the first time you have ever asked a favor of me. You shall have the money to-morrow, and if you succeed in Chesterfield Square I will promise you a handsome addition to your allowance—say, three hundred a year as long as I live. When I’m gone, what I have will be yours; I don’t have a favorite for nothing.”

I have a dim recollection that I fell down at her feet and hid my red head in her lap. I can feel the touch of her hand on my hair to this day. “Dear Aunt Eliza,” I said, after a time, “I don’t want to be looking forward to the time when you won’t want your money. I am no fortune-seeker, as you know. But the two hundred pounds I do want and badly, and the help that you generously offer me afterwards I accept with all my gratitude.” And then I kissed her two hands and struggled to my feet again, feeling a little ashamed of my outburst.

Aunt Eliza Says Two Words

"There—there—get a good breakfast and then go and see what fortune awaits you," said my aunt, kindly. "If you come back a victor I'll eat the words I uttered about Margaret Eden just now."

She was safe in making such a promise. I went along to the house in Chesterfield Square, a grand-looking mansion, where the door was opened by a splendid footman who looked me over as if I were something to sell and he had no mind to buy me, and after some delay I was taken into a dainty little room where Mrs. Eden came to me.

But why detail what followed? In brief, she told me that Margaret was distressed that I should have thought anything more of our little affair, that she was devotedly attached to Comte de Lancy, and that it would be as useless as painful to see her.

I insisted on doing so, as my right, and presently Margaret came to me, a Margaret that was lovelier than ever—a fashionable, elegant, modish Margaret, whom I did not know, and yet with whom I was more madly in love than I had been with the simple

Grip

little maid that I had wooed a while back at Thorpe-Hutton.

But she made herself quite clear to me. Among other changes she had acquired a light and airy manner, so that every word she uttered stabbed me right to the very heart.

“Dear old George,” she said—the very words that she had used months before at Thorpe-Hutton, and yet how different—“I am afraid you are feeling anger against me; but though I am distracted to grieve you, I must admit that I have given all my heart to Comte de Lancy.”

“Margaret!” I said, with deep reproach, “you promised.”

“Did I?” she asked, airily. “It was very silly of me. You see I was a mere child; and I had never seen Desmond.”

I saw as I looked hard at her that she was utterly lost to me. It was no use to say another word—words are as dross in some moments of our lives. I looked at her again—I forgot myself, the Frenchman, everything, and I caught hold of her, and kissed her fiercely a dozen times. She

Aunt Eliza Says Two Words

freed herself at last with a cry, "How dare you—how dare you!" she gasped; and then she snatched a little handkerchief from her belt and rubbed her lips hard as if my touch had been pollution.

I looked at her and laughed, a laugh that sounded frightful even to my own ears. "Dare?" I said, with a sneer; "do you ask a Somers that? Pah! Keep your Frenchman out of my way, I tell you. One day I shall spit him like a lark!"

CHAPTER IV.

HOW, WHEN, AND WHERE.

WHEN I stumbled out of Margaret Eden's presence that day I was as near demented as ever a man was in all this wide world. I hurled myself down the wide stairs just in time to encounter a slight, dark, handsome young man in the hall. I cast a glance at him thinking that he was the French beggar who had stolen my sweetheart from me, but the fine lacquey who was just at the foot of the stairs turned back to open the door for me with a—"One moment, my lord." So I made sure that he was only some gay young spark on a round of visits.

So I went from the house bankrupt of all that was good in me. I had said to Margaret's father months before that I meant to have her for my wife. I had flung the Somerses' motto in his teeth and

How, When, and Where

flaunted before him the fact that in the Regent's I was known as "the Bulldog." And this was the end of it all! They had carefully avoided fanning the flame of Margaret's love for me by even the smallest appearance of opposition; they had acted so as to lull any suspicions which might be lurking in my mind quietly to rest until they got me safely out of the way, with the breadth of the Irish sea between us. And then they had taken her away, had launched her, all young and impressionable as she was, upon a sea of fashion, and had given her every opportunity of forgetting her promise and me alike.

No doubt it was true enough that old Lady Maria had expressed a wish that Margaret and Mrs. Eden should spend the season in London, and that Margaret should be presented, but I had little or no belief that the wish had been a dying one or anything more than a suggestion put forward long before there had been any likelihood of her demise. And in all that they had done they had shielded themselves behind two things—old Lady Maria's

Grip

wishes and Squire Eden's stipulation that the little maid should be free of any definite promise to me, if so be that she should change her mind.

It was not more than three-quarters of a mile from Chesterfield Square to Hammett Street, but, in my rage, I gave no heed to my way and I walked up and down an apparently endless succession of streets and squares in a vain endeavor to tramp myself into composure again. I set my teeth hard and ground them together, while wild vows rose up in my heart that I would be even with the cur who had stolen my sweetheart. Aye, it was a fine revenge for Waterloo to deprive an Englishman of his maid, and like enough when he got her safely to his estate on the Rhone, he would practise every devilish cruelty upon her that the ingenuity of man could devise, just by way of paying a little of the nation's debt against us.

The very thought was maddening agony to me. I felt as if I would like to seek out this—this—Comte—and—and—just *tread* upon him! And yet I was so helpless, so

How, When, and Where

impotent. What could I do? Margaret was in love with him! In her happiness she had been cruel enough to speak of our—of *my* love as ‘a boy-and-girl affair.’ She had spoken of a lifelong friendship. **My God!** As if such a friendship was possible for me! She was going willingly enough to the estate on the Rhone—she was as much lost to me as if all the devils in hell stood between us!

At last I found myself, almost by accident, at the door of my aunt’s house in Hammett Street, when I suddenly realized that I was spent with fatigue and excitement; so I turned and went in.

My aunt was just passing through the hall to the dining-room on her way to dinner, for she proclaimed herself an old-fashioned lady, and dined at two o’clock, taking supper at the same hour as we dined at Somersley. I believe that her passion for whist had to do with this, as a cold supper may be a movable feast, while a waiting dinner is most frequently a spoiled one.

“Is that you, George?” she said. “You

Grip

are just in time for dinner. I've got salmon and boiled mutton—your favorite dishes."

She must have sent out purposely to get them, and I followed her into the dining-room, although my very gorge rose at the thought and mention of food. "James," said my aunt to her servant, "you need not wait to-day. Mr. George and I want to be alone."

The servant arranged the table so that we could help ourselves and then retired. As the door closed behind him Aunt Eliza looked up at me across the cut of steaming salmon and said in a sharp tone of interrogation—"Well?"

My answer was a groan.

"Ah, then you're satisfied that it's all true," she remarked. "I, of course, knew it all along."

"Then why did you not warn me in the beginning?" I cried, fiercely.

"My dear boy, you never confided in me," she replied. "I heard the first news of it from your father, who was here a few days back. He was full of it—and of what your disappointment would be. It was the

How, When, and Where

first that I had heard of it or that you were even thinking about Margaret, the little hussy. But, George, take my advice. I've never been married, but I'm a woman of the world—there's no squeamishness about me. Eat! Eat! An empty sack never yet stood upright, and whether you're broken in love or fortune a good stomachful will always stand you in good stead. Try this salmon—it's as good as one ever gets in London."

I took the salmon and the boiled mutton, and some apple tart and prime Cheshire cheese which followed, and I certainly felt all the better for them.

"Now," said Aunt Eliza, when I had come to an end; "now I want to know what you are going to do?"

"Kill him," I replied, briefly, for the good dinner, while it had made me physically better, had not in any sense softened my rage. "Kill him!" I repeated.

"Good!" said my aunt. "But the question is how, when, and where?"

I looked up in amazement. "Hey?" I said, puzzled.

Grip

“Just this! Because a little hussy has jilted you, and a Frenchman has cheated you, there’s no need to ruin your life and bring all your family into disrepute. This Comte de Lancy is a person of considerable importance here, and his position at the Embassy brings him very much into notice! I suspect that there will be trouble if you challenge him here—and happen to kill him.”

“I shall certainly kill him,” I put in.

“I daresay you will,” said my aunt, helping herself to some fruit, “and that answers my question of *how*? The next question is *when*?”

“As soon as I can get hold of him.”

“No, no; for we have already decided that it must not be managed so as to spoil your prospects,” she insisted. “I don’t know how far it may be true, but I am told that the duke strongly disapproves of duelling.”

“It’s true enough,” I admitted.

“Then a duel with a prominent Frenchman will about cook your goose in that quarter—whether it be in England or in France.”

How, When, and Where

“Then,” said I, doggedly, leaning back in my chair and keeping my eyes fixed on my glass of port wine; “then my goose must be cooked, that’s all.”

“H’m! Then that almost disposes of the question of when and where,” said my aunt. “George, you’d better give it up.”

“Aunt Eliza, I can’t and won’t give it up,” I said, setting my teeth, and speaking through them. “I had rather give up my life.”

“She’s not worth it,” said my aunt, deliberately cracking a nut and dipping it in the salt on the edge of her plate. “But I understand you well enough. I once hated a woman like that. You mean to give up your commission, then?” She spoke as coolly as if she had said, “Are you going to fill your glass again?” and her manner was as refreshing to me as if she had put my revenge into my hand without the trouble of seeking it.

“I must wait till I am of age for that,” I said.

“And your birthday is in September! Yes, that will give them time to get com-

Grip

fortably married and settled down on their estate on the Rhone. It seems to be there right enough and that silly Mrs. Eden declares that he is very rich, but I daresay they make the most of it. Most likely they will winter in Paris."

"He will winter in a warmer climate," I snarled.

My aunt laughed. "Doubtless! However, we can leave that to chance. Do you mean to confide in your father?"

"Not a word," I replied.

"Then I must keep your counsel! Then what excuse will you make to him for giving up the Army?"

"None. I shall give it up and tell him afterwards. He will but think that I am fickle and have changed my mind, and if he blames Margaret Eden he will all the better understand my situation when I have killed her husband."

"Good! Well, boy, I'm grieved that your wooing has sped so badly—most grieved. But I love a lad to be a lad, and whatever happens you may consider yourself your godmother's heir from this mo-

How, When, and Where

ment. The money for your few debts you shall have to-morrow, and I'll settle the question of your allowance when we hear what your father's intentions are."

I put out my hand and took hers, then bent and kissed it.

"Aunt Eliza," I said, brokenly, "why are you so good to me?"

"Tut, boy. I'm your godmother—your mother's favorite sister. And, besides that, I've a fellow-feeling with you. Didn't I tell you that I, too, have hated in my time, and do yet for the matter of that, when I happen to think of it, which is not often, thanks be to goodness. Still, hate is a serpent that's hard to kill; one never knows when there's life in it. Your trouble, boy, has told me that this especial serpent of mine is only scotched, not killed, and so I am the more disposed to help you than I should be if I were the old maid some people take me for. I'll stand by you, George—here's my hand on it."

She left me then, being due at a whist-party upstairs. Eleven old ladies, all as

Grip

keen on gaming as herself, had arrived while we were talking, and James came to warn her that coffee and cream was served.

“Coffee and cream, Aunt Eliza?” I said, in surprise. “What a mixture to play whist on.”

“French cream,” said my aunt, with a wink that would have done me no discredit.

She adjusted her turban at the pier-glass ere she left me, and bade me not sit too long. “Remember, you’ve got an object in keeping your head clear,” she said, significantly.

She was a brave old girl, my Aunt Eliza, and I sat down again with a sigh of relief that she had taken my trouble so well, and in such a spirit of generosity. For, you see, her help would make me free as air to hunt this French rat down, and fight him, whether he would or no.

I had little or no choice but to sit down with the best grace that I could muster and wait until time and opportunity should deliver mine enemy into my hand. I had but enough leave of absence to enable me

How, When, and Where

to stay four days in London; at the end of that time I must set out upon my return journey, and until I was of age to take the conduct of my affairs entirely into my own hands, I must put in the time in Ireland and perform my military duties with what zest I could. In September I should be free to throw off the trammels of the profession that I had entered with all the fervor of heart and soul. And then, hey for liberty, equality, and that fraternity which would end in six inches of cold steel for myself or for my enemy—the French dog who had got the better of me!

Grip

CHAPTER V.

A MARKED MAN.

I SPENT the remainder of my time in London in tracking down the Comte de Lancy. My aim was to make myself well acquainted with his person, so that I might have no difficulty in recognizing him later on, when I should have need of him.

I found no little difficulty in placing him, for I was a comparative stranger to the great city, and did not know the ways of those who were habitually living there. I could not go in and out of the different clubs saying, "Would you do me the favor to point out the Comte de Lancy, sir?" I might perchance have hit upon the gentleman himself. And had I not committed quite so maladroit a blunder as that, I might have aroused suspicion in the minds of those whom I addressed, in spite of the uniform that I wore.

A Marked Man

Besides these considerations I felt strange in the gay world, and like a fish out of water. I was but a soldier engrafted on the nature of a simple country gentleman; I knew not the ways of life of those around me. They prated a jargon that I barely understood, I was all at sea in the manners and modes, and my brother Bob, the dandy Life Guardsman, who might have put me at my ease and told me all the things that I most wanted to know and yet would not ask of a stranger, had, I found, gone away on a few days' leave of absence. So I wandered about the streets, always watching for a sight of one beloved face and hoping to see one near to it which would give me the clue I sought.

I was too ken-speck myself to venture much in the neighborhood of Chesterfield Square, for I did not want to bring myself into contempt with the Eden family, or to do anything which would place me incontestibly in the wrong and so lower me in their eyes, especially hers. I ventured into the square on the second evening after the dusk had fallen, but I saw

Grip

no sign of them. Evidently they were all out junketing.

As I said I was too ken-speck myself to take any but the most ordinary measures in my searchings. Never a time did I walk down a London street but some juvenile wag would make some remark relative to my great size and height.

But, at last, just as I was beginning to think that I should have to go back to Ireland without having marked my man, I saw them—I mean Margaret Eden and Comte de Lancy—walking along the Hay-market together, and to my intense surprise I found that Comte de Lancy was no other than the man whom I had encountered in the hall at Chesterfield Square, and whom I had heard addressed as “my lord” by Squire Eden’s magnificent footman.

They did not perceive me. They had evidently just got out of a carriage which was following at a foot’s pace. They were laughing and talking very gayly, and his air of devotion to her was sickeningly fulsome. I understood, if that was the kind

A Marked Man

of attention she liked, how it was my simple and honest love-making had failed to satisfy her.

They were so taken up with each other that they never noticed me—at least Margaret Eden did not perceive me, and he probably had caught so fleeting a glimpse of my person that day in Chesterfield Square that, even had he looked me full in the face, he would not have recognized me.

They passed into a jeweler's shop, and the spruce carriage with its tall fine horses drew up at the kerb. I stood for a moment watching them through the window. Bah! the sight was too sickening. To think that a maid who had once loved me could be satisfied for a moment with such a whipper-snapper as this De Lancy! True, he had a handsome face, straight in feature, and brilliant in coloring, but compared with me he was a shrimp, a weakling, a mere make-believe of a man.

Doubtless he had been a gay spark enough in his time; he had the appearance of it, but the over-profusion of his manner, the vehemence of his gestures,

Grip

and the elaborate care which had been bestowed on his toilet, all combined to create an unmanliness which was abhorrent to me, as it ought to have been to any Yorkshire lass trained from her cradle to the appreciation of every healthy and manly pursuit.

I watched them long enough for their coquetties to fill my very soul with loathing, and to impress my fine gentleman's face indelibly upon my memory, and then I tore myself away from the window and swung away towards Pall Mall. I hated them, myself, London and every one in it, and my whole soul was filled by one feeling only, a savage hunger and thirst for revenge—revenge—revenge !

The next morning I bade good-bye to my aunt and set out upon my return journey. Her parting words rang in my ears as I went. "Remember," she said, as I kissed her for the last time, "that you have an object. Live by line and rule, so that you shall be in perfect condition both of mind and body when your time comes. He has no such incentive—his life during

A Marked Man

the next three months will be one of self-indulgence and holiday-making. Pay all your debts as soon as you are settled in your quarters, and keep your living, while you are waiting, as economical as you can. You will want all your money. I have been buying the bride's wedding-gift this morning. I bought what I thought would be appropriate—a sachet lined with *peau d'Espagne*, and holding a dozen finely-embroidered handkerchiefs. She," significantly, "will want 'em!"

I laughed fiercely, and it was with that picture of desolation and widowhood in my mind's eye that I turned my back upon the great town which held my darling, who was on the eve of marriage with another.

My aunt wrote to me when the sacrifice was completed. In my interests she had accepted the invitation to the wedding, and was indeed the only member of my family who was present, not because of any feeling for me, but because those in Yorkshire never thought of making so long a journey on purpose, and my two brothers who passed most of their lives in London

Grip

were both engaged elsewhere on that day. My doughty old aunt, however, went as a matter of principle, and, I should say, gloated over the sorrow not far ahead for the pretty bride—if, that is, her letters to me were any criterion of the state of her feelings.

Among other items of news that I gathered from her was the announcement of the fact that the Comte and Comtesse de Lancy were going abroad within a few days of the marriage, first to visit the estate on the Rhone and then to spend the winter in Paris.

I smiled to myself a grim and mirthless smile, remembering that I, too, was destined to spend the winter in Paris—or part of it.

It was almost winter when I found myself free of all English trammels and ready to start for France, with the price of my commission safely lodged in my bank, which, with my quarterly allowance from my father and a gift of a hundred pounds from my aunt, made a very tidy feeling of security for me. So well provided for, I had no compunction in equipping myself

A Marked Man

as a man of moderate fashion, so that I might go from the first into such society as would sooner or later bring me in contact with my enemy.

I wrote a letter of farewell to my father; told him that I had sold out of the Army; that I was going abroad for reasons of a purely personal kind; begged him not to be uneasy about me, and assured him that I would write home from time to time. I begged him to excuse me if I seemed wanting in respect in not having gone down to Yorkshire to bid him and my family farewell, and pleaded as my reason consideration for the expense of the journey. Then I bade good-bye to my aunt, and set off on my quest. And surely never did knight of old set out on holy mission with more zeal and fervor in his heart than I set out from my native country in order that I might hunt down even to the very death the man who had stolen my best beloved—the maid of my heart—from me. It might be thought that the months which had gone by would have somewhat softened my hatred; but, on the contrary, in reality

Grip

they seemed rather to have inflamed my passion. Looking back, it seems to me now that I had almost forgotten my lost love in my hatred of the thief who had stolen her from me. It is no exaggeration to say that I would at any moment cheerfully have given my life in order to be able to cry quits with the man who had wronged me.

You will smile, perhaps, as you read these lines, but my first feeling after I found myself in Paris was one of intense homesickness. The strange ways, the foreign faces and figures, and, above all, the altogether unintelligible jabbering voices, all combined to make me feel like an outcast and an alien. In a certain sense I was both, but still I had gone of my own free will, in pursuit of my own interests entirely. I was free to leave it if I chose, at my own time and in my own way, and yet I was possessed of a feeling as if a vice of iron had caught me, and I was powerless to struggle against its merciless grip.

I found it more difficult than I expected to make my way into society. I had confi-

A Marked Man

dently anticipated that, with my introductions, I should find all Paris open to me, as I should have found all London—but it was not so.

I could have had all the English society to be found in Paris, if not exactly at my feet, certainly at my service, but I very soon found that the De Lancy family—that is to say, Comte de Lancy's mother and sisters—did not go very much into the English society, but almost entirely confined themselves to intercourse with French people.

At that time we English were none too popular with Parisians, and many hostesses were averse to receiving Englishmen. Those who did receive me could not understand me, nor I them, and before I had been in Paris six weeks I was forced to the unpleasant conclusion that before I could hope to meet De Lancy on terms of complete equality I must make myself familiar with his detestable language !

Not that I was in the least turned from my purpose. I might have to wait for years ; for although I was in Paris, his own

Grip

capital, yet I did not meet him. It was as if he was hedged about with all manner of sheltering circumstances ; it was almost as if he knew of my intention, and was keeping purposely out of my way.

But, mind you, De Lancy had the reputation of being no coward. He had also the name of being one of the best swordsmen in France, and of having killed his man several times. It was this reputation which made me so eager to meet him on strictly equal terms, to meet him in his own world ; and then—then—well, time would decide the rest for both of us.

I set myself a-studying the French language, and much as I hated it and despised and loathed its twists and turns, I kept doggedly at it, having always my end in view. I put myself also under the finest fencing-master in all Paris, one M. Brisso, who put me up to every trick of the game, and, moreover, complimented me not seldom on my strength and skill. I worked as hard at fencing as I did at French, and with more zest. The acquisition of French was only a means to an end ; the

A Marked Man

study of fencing was almost the end itself.

Another month went by. Every time that I went into the fencing-school I came out the more perfected in the art, but even though I was taking a lesson every day and writing exercises, and learning phrases like a schoolboy, I scarce made any progress in the language, and the babel of voices around me was as undistinguishable as it had been on my arrival in Paris.

So another month went by, and yet another. I could speak a few phrases, such as would ask for the bare necessities of life, and I had learned to clap my heels together and bend myself double on occasion as I noticed the Frenchmen did, but I seemed to be little or no nearer to my object.

I did ask one or two Englishmen whose acquaintance I made if they knew De Lancy, but it so happened that none of them were personally acquainted with him, though each knew him by reputation. Then, at last, I heard the news by a side

Grip

wind that he was in the south somewhere, delayed by the illness of his wife, who was suffering from some kind of fever, but that the lady was better, and that they would presently be at the hotel in Paris which he had but lately bought—with his wife's dower, I have no doubt.

Oh, well, there was no hurry. Every day I was picking up more of his language, and every lesson that I took in the school of M. Brisso so served to make me a more dangerous antagonist. And then something happened to me which made a difference.

I was sitting one day at dinner in the café at which I took most of my meals, when I noticed three ruffianly-looking fellows sitting hard by, all jabbering one against another as if they were at a talking-match and he that could talk down the others would win. I paid but little heed to them, for gentry of that kind had but small value for me, and these were especially unsavory, both in looks and manners.

They were not a little interested in me,

A Marked Man

for I saw first one and then another steal furtive glances at me, and at length one of them rose from the table and approached me. "Sir," he said, "you are Engleesh; could you oblige me with the direction of Mistaire John Drummond?"

"I am sorry, sir," I replied, "that I do not know the gentleman."

"He lives in London, somewhere——"

"I am sorry, sir," I said, civilly. "London is a big place, and I do not know it well."

"Pardon, if I derange you," said he, fawningly. Then looked hard at me again. "Pardon, m'sieu, but have I the honnaire to address Mistaire Henri Clare?"

"No sir; that is not my name," I replied.

"You call it Clare or Clar—ck?"—he persisted.

"There is such a name as Clark in England," I replied.

"Clar—ck! Ah, yes. Henri Clar—ck," he repeated.

I rose from my seat—I had already paid my bill—and took my gloves, hat,

Grip

and cane. "Good-night to you, sir," I said, rather curtly.

I did not know what the beggar meant to be at, but I knew that it would not suit my book to be mixed up with any ruffians of his breed. I therefore deemed it best to cut it short and clear out of the place.

I walked away at a good pace down the street, but had barely turned the corner when I heard a tramp of feet behind me and felt a heavy hand clapped on my shoulder, and the next moment I was surrounded by a *possé* of policemen.

In The Toils

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE TOILS.

WHEN I found myself surrounded by French policemen, all moved with the evident intention of arresting me, I abandoned myself to my natural instincts, and fought like a bulldog for my liberty. I had not been born in Yorkshire, and of a good old Yorkshire stock, for nothing. I was in fine condition, and I had never addled my head by over-drinking. I laid about me with my fists—for I could not get at the pistol which I always carried about me—and, in a trice, four Frenchmen were sprawling on the pavement at my feet. I fought my hardest; but though they were at least twenty to one they had not the courage to fight fair. They were the same stuff, these Frenchmen, as those who but a few years before had driven the women,

Grip

aye and the little children, of the *noblesse* to the scaffold, and had absolutely wallowed in the lust of bloodshed. I knew enough of their language to catch a meaning sometimes, and I heard the sergeant in charge of the party tell one of the men at the side of me to trip me up. I flung prudence to the winds and turned on my fine gentleman, seizing him by the throat with both hands and fairly cracking his skull against the wall. He had not so much as a yell left in him when I let him drop to the ground, but I then, being at a disadvantage, was immediately overpowered and flung helplessly down. It was no use wasting my strength in further useless strivings ; they had got the better of me, the brutes, and I knew that I should only be the loser by not submitting. So I, in less than half an hour, found myself lodged in what proved afterwards to be the filthiest hole I had ever seen—swarming with vermin, foul in smell, dank and damp as an underground cellar. Herein I was thrust without light, food, or water, and the door was bolted and barred behind me.

In The Toils

Like most other men of my station, I carried a little tinder-box in my pocket, and I managed to get a light which would show me what manner of place I was in. Furniture there was none, a bundle of damp-straw in one corner being all the provision that had been made for sleeping. I went over to it and sat down, then my light went out, and I knew that I could do nothing more beyond waiting till morning.

I was a little stiff from my tussle, and my dinner having been a highly spiced one, I was very soon raging with thirst. However, there was no help for that save patience, and I passed the night as best I could: and, at length, the sickly winter dawn began to steal slowly through the bars of the windows.

I do not know to this day what prison I was in, for when at last a jailer appeared, bringing with him a long roll of bread and a jug of water, I found that he only spoke a *patois* of which not one word in twenty was intelligible to me. So, though I put the question to him in the best

Grip

French that I could muster, I both failed to understand him and to make him understand me.

Later in the morning I was taken before some kind of court. I do not know what court it was, where it was situated, or who were my judges. I was told chiefly by signs where to go, and certain remarks were read out to me in a sing-song nasal voice of which I comprehended the meaning no better than I should have done had they been spoken in Chinese. All that I gathered was the fact that I was supposed to be one Henry Clark, who was, poor devil, evidently much in request by the Paris police at that moment. I protested vigorously that I was not Henry Clark, and that I had never heard of any such person, though I recognized the name as an English one.

Upon this I was hustled back to my cell, and later on my dinner was brought to me, consisting of dark-looking bread and suspiciously pale soup. I had never been over-much given to eating soup, but by that time I was hungry enough to have eaten

In The Toils

anything, so I made the best meal that I could under the circumstances.

My situation did not much trouble me, for I knew that I could easily disprove the assertion that I was Henry Clark, and my innocence of whatever he happened to be suspected of. Then it suddenly occurred to me that if I chanced to have hit the head of that policeman a trifle too hard against the wall, I might be let in for a few years of exceedingly unpleasant life on that account, while, in the event of such becoming known, all idea of ever meeting De Lancy on equal grounds would be at an end forever. On equal grounds!—pooh; on grounds of any sort. De Lancy was an aristocrat, a man high up in the diplomatic world. He would not meet me at all, and he would be perfectly justified in his refusal to do so.

I had little or no hope of altogether getting off the consequences of my hotheadedness. The feeling at that time of day all over France, and particularly in Paris, was very strong against the English, and not without good reason. I had killed, or

Grip

half-killed one of the *gens de police* while in the execution of his duty, and whether I was Henry Clark, or George Somers, or anybody else, I was scarcely likely to entirely escape the consequences of my folly.

I remained in my cell for several days, being fed as badly as I well could be. Then I was conducted through a great many long passages to a cell of a rather better description, in which was a chair, a pallet-bed, and a wash-basin.

Before I had been an hour in occupation of this new quarters I had a visitor, a small, weazened, meagre-looking elderly man, who addressed me in fluent English but of indifferent accent. He told me he was a permitted interpreter and lawyer, and asked me whether I would like to make use of him in my approaching examination.

I told him civilly that I did not know that I was soon to be examined, thanked him for his intentions, and asked him, fair and square, what he would be able to do to help me?

In The Toils

He told me in a low voice that I was believed to be Henry Clark, which I promptly and indignantly denied.

“ You 'ave your papers ? ” he asked.

“ Yes ; I have,” I replied.

“ You can make your identification certain ? ” he said, looking at me with his little red-rimmed eyes, as if my answer was a foregone conclusion.

“ I can, if I choose,” I replied.

“ But if you don't choose—eh ? ”

“ I don't understand you,” I said, bluntly.

“ It is very easy,” he said, speaking in a tone of quiet conviction. “ You 'ave not shown your papers ? ”

“ No ; I have not got them with me. They are at my rooms.”

“ Ah ! ” The single word spoke volumes.

“ And you do not wish to produce them ? ”

“ I don't intend to produce them.”

“ You will 'ave a great punishment for cracking the 'ead of the unfortunate Jean Duval,” he said, quietly.

“ I expect I shall. I'll put up with that.”

Grip

“But the affair of this Henri Clark—that is quite another mattaire—eh?”

“Well, naturally, I find my own sins quite enough to answer for,” I said, trying to laugh, for, somehow, his words all at once seemed to bring the full gravity of my situation home to me.

“Just so. And you would give something for papers which would give you identification—eh?”

“I would give all that I have,” I replied, without a moment’s hesitation.

“And you ’ave—eh?”

I pulled out my purse and emptied its contents on to the poor table before us. My new friend counted the money over, and put it up together into a little packet in one of the notes. “See to this, my good friend,” he said, in quiet business-like tones. “I ’ave the honor to be interpreter in the courts. I always do business if I can on both sides when it comes my way. ’Ere are papers—Charles ’Yde—all complete; but stay, ’ave you told your name?”

“No! They insisted that I was Henry

In The Toils

Clark, and beyond insisting that I was not I have not committed myself. I cannot understand their lingo—nor, apparently, they mine. They never asked me what my name was, or if they did I did not understand them."

"Good! Then take this paper—it is safe—Charles 'Yde is dead, gone to his reward, poor devil. Be Charles 'Yde from this moment."

I took the paper and read it carefully. It was dated but a few days later than my own passport. It set forth that Charles Hyde was twenty-five years of age, and was a gentleman travelling for pleasure! Poor devil, as my ferret-eyed little friend had but just called him—his pleasuring had soon come to an end. I had not the heart to inquire how!

I pushed the little packet of money towards him and put the passport into my own pocket-book. "Sir," I said, "I am more obliged to you than words can say. Will you give me your name and address that I may repay you in some way after I am free of this place?"

Grip

“This is my name—Jules Ferrand,” he replied, giving me a card bearing his name and address.

I took the card with a word of thanks and put it in my pocket. Then I asked him if he thought he could help me otherwise?

“If you were not Engleesh,” he said, in a tone which carried conviction with it, “I should say yes, most decidedly yes; as you are Engleesh I can but say that I am afraid you will ‘ave——”

“Yes, I know,” I said, impatiently. “I must abide by the consequences of my own folly. Will you be present at this examination?”

“But, yes——”

“Then——” and here I heard the key turn in the lock, “you will do what you can for me?”

“I will make it clear that you are *not* ‘Enri Clark,’ ” he said, with a leer and a wink, which all at once revealed to me that he believed that I really was the unfortunate man for whom I had been mistaken.

He left me, passing out with profuse

In The Toils

salutations to the exceedingly morose and unintelligible jailer who took care of me, and once more I was left alone.

Well, I had by a lucky chance fallen in with a villain who thought more of his own pocket than he did of his national prejudices, and my identity was fairly safe. Moreover, as Charles Hyde I was no longer liable for the sins of Henry Clark, and I should stand a better chance for the skull-cracking in which I had foolishly indulged myself. As Charles Hyde I might be supposed to object to the process of arrest, and be treated more lightly for resisting it! Time would show.

In my new cell I had the immense advantage of being able to wash myself, and I availed myself of it with great satisfaction. So by the time my examination came on I was able to present myself with a fairly clean and respectable appearance.

Almost the first person that I saw when I got into the court was my new friend, M. Jules Ferrand. He did not pay much attention to me, doing indeed no more than looking my way once or twice with his little

Grip

red-rimmed eyes. But, after a while, when a good deal of gabbling had gone on between the various officials—who reminded me more of a crowd of dogs fighting over a bone than anything else—he stood up, and, taking his questions from an official, who was, I imagine, an advocate, addressed me directly.

“Your name?” he asked.

“Charles Hyde,” I returned, boldly.

“Ave you papers of identification?”

“Yes. I have a passport.”

“Produce it, if you please.”

I took out my pocket-book and handed the passport to him.

“M. le President wishes to know why you did not produce this before?”

“I was not asked for it, or if I was, I did not understand the question. I only know a few words of French.”

“What brought you to Paris?”

“My pleasure—and a desire to acquaint myself thoroughly with the French language.”

“You understand now with what you are charged in this court?”

In The Toils

“Not in the very least.”

“First with being one Henri Clar-ck——”

“I am *not* Henry Clark,” I thundered.

“I don’t know him, never saw him, never heard of him. My name is Hyde—Charles Hyde.”

After a lot more gabbling, he continued, “The charge for which you were arrested —under the mistaken impression that you were one and the same person as Henri Clar-ck—is withdrawn. You had better thank M. le President for his clemency in accepting your identification.”

I could not for the very life and soul of me see that I had anything to thank M. le President for; rather ought he to have apologized to me for his myrmidons having mistaken me. However, I was not so anxious to further taste the pains and penalties of a French prison; so I promptly made a speech of thankfulness, which was, I thought, sufficiently mealy-mouthed to satisfy even the dignified old gentleman sitting in the place of honor so like the church-warden’s pew at Somersley.

“M. le President is graciously pleased to

Grip

accept your expressions of gratitude," Jules Ferrand continued in unctuous accents. "You may consider your identification complete. Therefore the only charge against you at present is that of having caused the death of Jean Duval, one of the *gens de police*, while in the execution of his duty. On that account you will have to await trial until such date as will be made known to you later on."

Suspense

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPENSE !

I WAS thereupon conducted back to my cell with the pleasant prospect of staying there in complete ignorance of my ultimate fate for an indefinite period. Later in the day Jules Ferrand again came to see me.

“I ‘ave to congratulate you,” he said, cheerfully, rubbing his hands together.

“And I to thank you, sir,” I replied, very heartily, and I held out my hand in the English fashion towards him.

He laid his hand in mine, but the next moment tore it away, shaking his fingers and uttering short yelps of pain and dismay. I perceived that I had shaken hands a bit too hard, and hastened to apologize for my carelessness with all penitence.

“I am so sorry. I forgot that you were not an Englishman!” I exclaimed, trying

Grip

to take his limp fingers to make certain that I had not really crushed them.

“*Mon Dieu!* No wonder you cracked the skull of Jean Duval,” he gasped, still shaking his fingers frantically, and then breathing on them, as if a sort of poultice of warm breath would be beneficial to them. “No—no—my good sir, I will keep my fingers to myself, if you please.”

At last, however, he seemed to have got over the accident, and was then able to give his attention to my unfortunate situation.

“You must not look to getting off altogether,” he said, warningly.

“I suppose not,” I returned.

“If you were not Engleesh it would be easy. As you are Engleesh, you must expect, *bien*, the results of national prejudice to stand somewhat against you.”

“All right,” said I, for I did not want to enter into an argument as to national prejudice with this little rat who, after all, if his nose went for anything, was of the French race only by adoption ; and would, indeed, like his fore-elder, Esau, have been ready to sell his own birthright as he

Suspense

had sold someone else's passport, for a consideration—otherwise a mess of pottage. "How long will they keep me hanging about here, do you think?"

"Ah! — 'ow can I say? But you can buy things for yourself. You can 'ave your repasts sent in from outside."

"If I pay for 'em," I said. "Unfortunately, I have no money with me."

"Could I get you some? Can you trust me?" he began, eagerly; but I cut him short at once. I was not going to trust the secret of my identity to him. Heaven alone knew what he might not make of it.

"It is impossible," I said, curtly—"quite impossible. I can promise you this, on the word and honor of an English gentleman ... if I get free of this business, I will give you one hundred pounds in cash within three days of my release."

His little red-rimmed eyes glistened, but the next moment a shadow fell over them and he shook his head. "I fear it is 'opeless," he said, dolefully. "I do my best. I 'ate to 'alf serve a client. I do my best—but I doubt!"

Grip

He left me then, promising to return. The next day he came back again offering to lend me a little ready money, to be paid back later at an utterly exorbitant rate of interest.

I declined the offer, not on account of the interest—for it was a case in which money was well worth *any* rate of interest—but, as I explained to him, because I was not certain that I should ever be able to pay it back again.

“Sir,” said the little man, with an air of dignity which sat strangely on him, “I ’ave already done you good service. Is it that you cannot trust me ?”

“Not at all. But it is imperative that I disclose my own name to no one at present, or, indeed, while connected with this matter. If I could do that, and could write you a cheque on my bank, it would be easy. But that course is simply impossible. I would rather die than let my friends either in England or in Paris trace me to this place. If I get away clear of this little accident, I will keep my word and you in grateful remembrance all my life. As it is, I prefer to

Suspense

remain in comparative discomfort rather than to upset all the plans of my life."

He left me then. I believe he was firmly convinced that I really was Henry Clark, and that I dared not draw a cheque for fear of being traced, and my crimes—real or suspected, whichever they might be—brought home to me. Well, let him think so. There was safety to my schemes in the suspicion. I said not one word which might dispel the impression.

I walked up and down the narrow confines of my cell for a long time after he had left me. It was wretched and comfortless, and the food was worse, but, after all, what real difference did mere food and lodging make to me in comparison with the great revenge for which I lived? None!

You may think that, placed as I was in a situation of the gravest danger, my feeling towards Comte de Lancy and Margaret would have faded in intensity. My life was at this time in gravest danger, my liberty was gone and might never be restored again. I was caught like a rat in a trap and was at the mercy of those who were my national

Grip

and most bitter enemies. And yet—yet—I thought of it all with comparative indifference, and if my feeling towards De Lancy had changed at all, it was that my hatred had flourished in the shade of misfortune, and my hunger and thirst for the equality of complete revenge had grown from a weakling into a giant. Was I, a great strong hulking fellow, with the constitution of an elephant and the digestion of an ostrich, who had spent half my life in some form of training or other, to endanger my most cherished schemes and desires for the sake of procuring something soft to lie upon, for the sake of dainties for my belly? Pooh! At the thought of it I laughed aloud, till the bare walls of my cell echoed again.

It seemed a long time ere any fresh break came in the monotony of my existence. I had no change of any kind, excepting that sometimes I was allowed to go out into a small yard, whose walls were so high that it seemed like looking up to Heaven out of a well. I could hear the shouts of other prisoners, but could not distinguish a single

Suspense

word they said, only that they seemed to be playing at some game and quarrelling, and certainly swearing above the ordinary. However, I made the best of my scrap of liberty, and walked and ran as regularly as if I were a free man, and half a dozen times a day at least I went through a series of exercises such as I knew would best keep my muscles hard and my nerve in tone.—No matter what might happen in the immediate future, I did not want to meet it feeling flabby and unmanned.

At last Jules Ferrand came again to see me. He told me that my trial was fixed at last for April 10; that he would do his best for me, but that I was to be prepared for the worst which might happen.

“Do you mean the *guillotine*?” I asked, bluntly, for the way in which the little man wrapped up his meaning in ambiguous phrases irritated me not a little.

“No, not so bad as that—or I ’ope not,” he replied. “But you will probably go to the *Bagne*—you will ’ave the *travaux forcés*, and the life of a *forçat* is by no means a joke.”

Grip

A joke! I should think not. Yet not even the taste I had already had of prison deterred me from my purpose, or for one moment tempted me to use such influence as I possessed in obtaining any mitigation of the punishment which probably was in store for me. To exert that influence I should have to expose myself to the chance of De Lancy's refusing to meet me—it was a risk which I would not have run to save myself any pain or discomfort that could possibly befall me.

Jules Ferrand sounded me again as to the chance of my finding money—"There are ways of slipping bolts and unlocking doors," he said, knowingly; but I resolutely shook my head.

"You mean that my jailers might be bribed," I said, coldly. "I daresay they could, and if escape was my only object we might try it. As it is, it is necessary for me to remain in Paris after I am free. In my own name nobody will suspect me of any connection with Charles Hyde. If the police were after me I should never know an easy moment, and all my plans

Suspense

might be frustrated just at the moment when all was going according to my best wishes. Thank you very much for the suggestion, but I would prefer to let things take their natural course."

He shrugged his shoulders as if he thought me the biggest fool he had ever met in the whole course of his life. Possibly, as his knowledge of French prison-life was more extensive than mine—for his way of making a living was such as would naturally bring him very much in contact with those whom we describe as "in trouble"—he would have foregone any uncertain chance of revenge and have thought only of his own precious skin. I, however, was made of different stuff. I meant to have De Lancy's blood sooner or later, and I had not been nicknamed "The Bulldog" for nothing, I had not been born in Yorkshire for nothing, I had not been born a Somers of Somersley for nothing!

There was good in the little Hebrew, all the same; he was not entirely wanting in the milk of human-kindness. I daresay he looked to his own interests first—most of

Grip

us do—only some of us are less openly egotistical in doing it than others. He was, I do think, genuinely anxious to see me get off scot-free, apart from any advantage that it might be to him personally. That morning he looked me up and down with something very like admiration in his little red-rimmed eyes. "You are a fine fellow to go to the *Bagne*," he said, shaking his head ruefully. "The *forçats* have mostly led different lives to yours."

"I am not a *forçat* yet," I returned, trying to speak lightly and not succeeding so well as I could have wished, for his regretful tone seemed like a foreshadowing of ill-luck.

"No—no—and I 'ope to 'ave that 'undred pounds yet!" he exclaimed, clapping me on the shoulder.

I hoped so too, and with all my heart. Still I must confess that I thought his chance of it was remarkably slender. I could not pretend that I had not killed the unfortunate policeman, while in the execution of his duty. I could only plead that the affair was an accident, inasmuch as I had

Suspense

no intention of killing him and no desire to do so; that I had unfortunately happened, in the heat of an undeserved arrest, and in the scrimmage of twenty to one, to knock his head a little harder against the wall than it would stand. The blame of the accident really lay more at the door of Jean Duval's thinness of skull than of any fault of mine. I felt that my case was good; the only thing was that, being an Englishman, the excuse might not serve.

At last the day of my trial came. I had been hoping all along that it would not attract much notice, and that nobody in court would recognize me as the big Englishman who had been seen about Paris and especially at Brisso's fencing-school for several months past.

Thus far I soon perceived that I was in luck's way. I scanned the court eagerly, but not one familiar face did I see. There was not a single soul that I knew.

You will think that I am giving but a meagre account of the proceedings; but in truth, they do not bear much upon my story, and, although of necessity I was

Grip

present at my trial, I could make neither head nor tail of what was going on. During the weeks which I had spent in prison my little stock of French had all gone from me, for my second jailer was a no more amiable person than the first, and he spoke an entirely different dialect, so that I had found communication with him difficult, and conversation impossible. The language used in the court might have been, and probably was, of the purest Parisian French—it was as Greek to me. Greek did I say? I meant Arabic.

So I spent several hours quite in the dark as to what was going on, excepting when my friend Ferrand put certain questions to me, which I answered as plainly and simply as I could. He made a kind of speech in which I fancy he set forth the extenuating circumstances which were admissible, and then there came a long horrible blank period of waiting for the verdict.

For Love of Woman

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR LOVE OF WOMAN.

WHEN the moment for hearing my doom came, the President of the Court distinctly addressed me. "Charles Hyde!" he said.

I stood upright, in an attitude of respectful attention, though I did not comprehend one word of what he was saying. When he had finished, my friend, Jules Ferrand, translated his words into English.

"Charles 'Yde,'" he said—"you 'ave been adjudged guilty of the death of the *gens de police*, Jean Duval, while in the execution of his duty. As you 'ave proved to the satisfaction of the court that you were arrested in mistake for another person, and were not unnaturally incensed thereat, you will be treated with an extraordinary leniency, and it is to be 'oped that

Grip

you will value this clemency as you ought to do. The court awards you fifteen years of the *travaux forcés*."

Fifteen years—*fifteen years!* My God! what a slice out of my life! My head went reeling round and round for a minute or two and a thick white mist came in front of my eyes, that I thought I was going to swoon away like a woman! Fifteen years—fifteen years—it was like contemplating eternity. Then a *gens de police* touched me not unkindly on the arm and I pulled myself together sufficiently to bow to the President and to utter a rather shaky "*Merci, Monsieur.*"

Then I went back the same way as I had come, yet oh, how different in feeling! Fifteen years! My God! I stumbled on to a stone bench, and hiding my face in my hands, wished wildly that I had foregone my revenge, that I had exerted my influence and even that I had let Ferrand bribe my jailers into letting me escape.

Some one touched me on the shoulder. I looked up—it was Ferrand. "Well?" I said, in a strange hoarse voice—the voice

For Love of Woman

no longer of a Somers of Somersley, but of Charles Hyde, the *forçat*.

“I am sorry,” he said, simply. “I did my best. I failed except in that I won some mitigation. Tell me, can I do anything else for you now?”

“Nothing,” I said, wretchedly.

“I can take no message to your friends?” he persisted.

“I have no friends in Paris,” I replied.

“Or write letters to your relations in England?”

“No—many thanks—I would not have them know my situation for the whole world.”

“There is no lady——?”

“None,” I replied, fiercely, and with a shudder. “You have done your best for me, sir, and I thank you with all my heart. If ever I am free I will seek you out and thank you differently. Until then I will ask you to forget that you ever knew such a one as myself. If I should be inquired for, described, will you favor me by giving those who ask no clue to my whereabouts?”

“Certainly, I will do that,” he said,

Grip

He stood looking at me with a distressed face, and kept his hand on my shoulder. It was the last kind touch from a free hand that I felt for years.

“Tell me,” I said, suddenly, “why have I been kept alone all these weeks? I have heard, when I have been exercising, other prisoners talking, laughing, swearing.”

“You are Engleesh,” he said, looking at me doubtfully. “They would not put you with the others; they wished to keep you safe for the trial.”

I burst out laughing as I grasped his meaning. “So,” I said, bitterly, “and now I take my chance, eh? Ah, well, I’m in for a spell of bad luck, but I am not done with yet. I can hold my own even in a gang of *forçats*.” And then it came into my mind again that I had not been called “the Bulldog” for nothing.

It seemed as if they were still a little careful of me—I suppose they wanted to save me to do at least a part of my sentence. At all events I was left alone sitting on the stone bench for some time after Jules Ferrand had left me—left to

For Love of Woman

think it all over—to try to realize that I was a convict sentenced to spend the next fifteen years in a French prison. Fifteen years! God above, it was like a century!

And Ferrand, poor little chap, had asked me if he could take any message for me; if there was no lady—a lady, my God, my God! Should I want to send a message to the woman who had brought me to this—the woman who had changed my whole life, ruined my career, blighted my existence, and to whom I directly owed my present situation, through whom I found myself like a caged bird with clipped wings? A message to her—dear Heaven, no!

And yet, as I thought over his well-meant offer, and recalled his hesitating words, they seemed to make a man of me once more! True, I had met with a run of bad luck—there was no gainsaying it. But must I sit down and let Fate do with me what she would? Must I abandon my revenge because I had been checked for the moment? Should I call out, “There is a lion in the way”? No; a thousand times, no! If I had six months ago been pos-

Grip

sesed of hunger and thirst for revenge, how much more so now ! I must not, would not, let this unlooked-for and almost accidental occurrence turn me from the great object of my life : on the contrary, I would add it to the debt already accumulated, and I would take heart of grace and patiently await the day on which I should pay it in full, *in full—and with interest !*

I got up from the stone bench and stretched myself. I was a new man. I had almost forgotten the wretchedness of a moment agone. Ill-luck had spread her dark wings over me—the star of Desmond de Lancy was in the ascendant, but I would conquer, I would win through ; let the life before me, the indignity, the suffering be what they might, I would win through. I would rise up, even though there be not so much as a day's mitigation of my sentence, and one day I would meet mine enemy face to face ; I would pay my debt, and in full !

I was a new man ! I had made up my mind. Despondency and repining should know me no more. If I was called Charles

For Love of Woman

Hyde, I would still be in my heart George Somers, ex-ensign of the Regent's, known in his regiment as "the Bulldog."

Dear heart alive ! I had need of all my resolutions, of all my Yorkshire pluck, of all my endurance, and of all my fortitude, for from that day I entered upon a life that was nothing short of hell upon earth. I had been born to no bed of roses, for we Somerses had always prided ourselves on our hardness ; I had knocked about fairly well for my years, and my sympathies had ever been with the king's son who ate of a little pulse and water ; but of such a life as I led after the President of the Court in which I met my fate addressed me in solemn words which I could not understand, I had never formed any conception. I had no suspicion that any such hell was to be found in all the length and breadth of Europe !

I found that the next sortie of *forçats* was destined for the *Bagne* of Toulon, and we waited day after day until our tale should be complete. I had seen the last of my solitary cell, for before nightfall they came

Grip

and conducted me to the general company of the condemned !

I never saw such a crew—at least, I had never seen such a crew until that hour ; the like were my daily portion from that time forward ! I was received with a howl of derision, I imagine because my clothes betrayed me as a man of class ; and when they found that I was an Englishman they closed in around me with the evident intention of saving the State any further expense on my behalf. Bah ! I took but little truck with them. I let fly right and left with my fists, and when one fellow who had not gone sprawling tried a quiet kick, I just caught him by the ankle and brought him down sharp on the flat of his back, so that I fancy he saw stars for some little time afterwards ; at all events, he did not see his way clear to tackling me again.

They were a set of miserable, craven wretches, ill-fed, ill-grown, ignorant of all save vice, without a ha'porth of pluck among them all. So far as I could gather from their jargon, when they found that I was not a weakling like themselves, they

For Love of Woman

somewhat glorified me. I believe they would even have cheered me if they had known how. As it was, they had only enough spirit to emit a yowl like a few half-strangled cats out on the tiles on a wet night.

Finding that I was to be left alone, even in a sense to be set on a pedestal, I sat me down on a vacant bench and surveyed my surroundings. I need not describe them—the men who were my companions in misfortune. It is enough to say that they were the riff-raff of the wickedest city in the world, and that they carried their social status clearly stamped upon their evil faces and plainly written in their filthy ways. There were only three in all that motley crowd who looked at all as if they had ever filled a respectable position in life: one was a burly middle-aged man in a blue blouse; another a decent-looking elderly man wearing a black coat; and the third was a mere boy, small and slight and fair, who sat at the other end of my bench, his elbows on his knees and his face hidden in his hands. I found out afterwards that he was a young clerk who had yielded to sudden temptation

Grip

and had helped himself to his employer's money. *His* term of the *travaux forcés* was twenty years! Poor lad, I watched him for a while, wondering if he were French or English, and pitying him that he did not pluck up a little instead of letting such a crew of *misérables* as those around us see plainly the full bitterness of his situation. Poor lad! he flung himself down next to me when we stretched ourselves upon the straw which was all our bed, and presently I heard him sobbing passionately under his breath, and so bitterly that after listening for some little time I rolled a little nearer to him, and put my hand on his shoulder. "Young 'un," I said, in a low voice, for I did not want the others to chime in, "young 'un, can you speak English?"

"Yes; I am English," he answered, choking down his sobs and raising his head so as to peer at me in the dim light.

"Gad! you don't say so. I say, young 'un, don't take it so to heart; time soon passes, and you'll get used to it."

"Twenty years!" he sighed; "twenty years—it's a lifetime."

For Love of Woman

I was almost sorry I had spoken. "So it is," I said. I was obliged to say something. "But still, care killed a cat. After all, it mayn't be so bad as you expect and, anyhow, fretting won't help you. You're English, you say. What's your name?"

"John Leroy."

"Leroy! It sounds almost French."

"My great-grandfather was French," he whispered. "I always call myself Jean Leroy in Paris—it doesn't do to be English, you know. Besides that, my mother is a Frenchwoman." And then he broke down and began to sob again. "Oh, my mother, my poor, poor mother!" he muttered, tearfully.

"Yes. Well, you should have thought of your poor mother a bit earlier," I said, for I had little or no sentimentality about me. "See here, when we move out of this try and keep near to me, as near as you can. If they guess you are English or can even speak English, they will keep us apart. Perhaps I can help you on a little one way or another."

He peered at me again through the dim

Grip

light cast by the one small swinging lamp overhead. "Have you ever seen a gang of *forçats* on their way to the *Bagne*?" he asked.

"Never," I whispered back.

"Then you don't know what lies before you. Do you think that you go by coach? *Mon Dieu*, they will take us chained—chained like wild beasts all through the streets of Paris, all through France, past towns, villages, woods, forests, on—on—on—till we come to—*Hell*!"

I did not like to tell the poor lad that he ought to have thought of all this before. Instead, I said to him, "What brought you to this?"

He confided his pitiful story to me—a common one enough. I have already told you its main features. "I would have put the money back," he said, earnestly. "I only borrowed it—I never meant to steal it. I did not, indeed."

"No, no; of course not. But, you see, that's the brutal way the world looks at it. Any way, it is no use bemoaning your hard fate now. Pluck up—be a man—

For Love of Woman

make up your mind that you will win through."

I think he was comforted, for he went to sleep with his hand in mine; and I—well, perhaps you will smile when I tell you that I felt as if I had found something to live for. I mean something more tangible, more real, than the deadly feverish future which possessed me. For a long time I lay wide awake in the straw holding the lad's hand, and thinking how strange it was that the love of Margaret Eden should have brought me to this!

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNEXPECTED.

I DON'T know that anything which happened after my foregathering with young Jean Leroy served so thoroughly to bring home my situation to me with full horror as did that first night passed in the straw of the general cell to which I was introduced a few hours after I had received my sentence. It was a wholly new experience to me and a horrible one. The close and fœtid smell of the place, the groans, the moans, the snores and the sobs of the occupants intermingled with fierce oaths and scraps of ribald song, all revolted and sickened me. On my word I do not know which I despised and loathed the most—the craven hearts of those who sobbed with terror and despair, full of penitence *that they had been found out*, or the bold and evil natures of those who made the best of a run of bad luck, with a devil-

The Unexpected

may-care spirit which would send them out into the world again by and by, more wicked and more ready for all sorts and conditions of crime than ever.

We had a fortnight more of this life before we began the long tramp to Toulon, a fortnight which seemed like a year of never-ending days which dragged slowly along in continuous ribaldry and din. For the noise was unceasing ; it continued day and night, and though I slept at times from sheer weariness, if ever I awoke there was always at least one group awake and alert, singing, gaming, or quarrelling, and sometimes doing all three. I think if I had fallen on these evil days straight from my life with the Regent's where one never knew much of the pleasures of quietness, or, even direct from a long stay at Somersley, where there was always the racket of a large family much given to all manner of sport and of rollicking fun, that I should not have felt it so much. But I had been kept for many weeks in solitary confinement, without a soul with whom I could exchange an intelligible word, with never a sound from the

Grip

outside world to pierce the walls of my cell. And before that I had lived almost alone for several months, ~~of~~ necessity spending many hours a day studying a foreign language, and usually eating all my meals at a single table in solitude in the modest and respectable restaurant which I frequented, so the exchange was doubly terrible to me.

I believe that most of our fellow-prisoners would have been perfectly content to remain in that loathly atmosphere forever. For my part I almost jumped for joy when the order came to prepare for the march. To each and all of the others it was as the announcement of doom, and those who had seemed the most devil-may-care and reckless began to shrink into themselves, and to shed all the cocksure airs in which they had so freely indulged before. My young friend, Jean Leroy, began to cringe and cry weakly; but his dread was natural enough. All, or at least I should say, the most he feared was that his mother and sisters would be waiting about on the line of route for the chance of getting a last look at him, ere he went into the oblivion of twenty years

The Unexpected

of the *travaux forcés*. I comforted him as best I could, reminding him that at least we should be able to breathe the free breezes of Heaven instead of the pestilential and polluted air which was at present our portion.

“You don’t know—you don’t understand,” he almost wailed in the intensity of his despair, “the shame, the humiliation, the torturing fear of recognition! We shall be chained like wild beasts one to another in a string half a mile long. To be seen by one’s friend, one’s mother, one’s sweetheart——”

“You should have thought of all this before you did what brought you here, my boy,” I said gruffly, for there was no sense in letting him rob himself of such small store of strength as he possessed.

“And you also,” he retorted. It was the first time that he had ever alluded to my position as being equal with his own. I did not resent it—he was too weak and womanish for that.

“Well,” I said, quietly, “perhaps if I had known as much as you seem to do

Grip

about these matters, I should have kept myself in better check and there would be one policeman more to bring the erring to account. But I, at least, take my fate without overmuch repining, and in a spirit of philosophy. You have English blood in your veins, my boy ; try to show it."

It was useless to preach to him ; he was a weakling, a poor feeble soul, without the heart of a mouse in that delicate girlish body of his. He flung himself down in the straw beside me, mumbling piteously at my hand. "Charley, Charley," he moaned, "don't let me anger you, my one friend, my one stand-by, my salvation. I'm weak—weak—my mother spoiled me—"

"Nay," I broke in, "never let yourself say that, lad. The fault is all your own—be a man and admit it. Never cry out upon your mother that she was too loving. If she was so, she has suffered enough ere this."

Poor lad, poor lad ! It was a frail and pitiful nature, and his very weakness served to make me more strong. I shall never forget his agonized face as they put the

The Unexpected

fatal collar upon his neck, poor lad ! They put him just in front of me, with the idea, I knew, that my great height would prove further pain and tribulation for both of us. I let them—I made no effort to alter things. We were badly matched without a doubt, but I knew that I could spare the lad a great deal if I were near him, far more than my greater height would inflict upon him as we marched.

I proved the truth of this the very first day, for the *forget* immediately in front of Leroy was an old hand who was making the journey for the third time. I found within a couple of hours that the lad's neck was beginning to raw—and, but think of it, we had weeks of marching before us—so I signified by his mouth that if his neighbor continued to twitch the chain as he was doing then, I would find a way to make it worse for him. My threat had the desired effect.

And yet it was a horrible journey, full of pain, fatigue, terror, humiliation, and distress. From the moment of leaving the gates of our prison we became intimately

Grip

acquainted, in all their most hideous forms, with terrors by night, with the arrows of abuse and shame that flew by day, with the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day. Long before we had done the half of our journey the old hand, who marched immediately in front of Jean Leroy, fell, and was released from the chain. A guard remained in charge of him, but whether he lived or died I cannot say—I never knew. Anyway, I never saw him again. He never came to Toulon, so I conclude that his end was that of a nameless grave in the peaceful little village, just then white with cherry blossoms, near to which he fell.

We had left Paris in late April, when all the country was looking its best and fairest. At first, when I used to lie awake in the straw, which was all the bed we had in the sheds wherein we lay at night, and heard in the early dawn the little birds outside cheeping and twittering in their free and happy enjoyment of the dawning day, I used to think of dear, far-away Somersley, and wonder if I should ever see the cherry

The Unexpected

orchards there again? But that stage did not last long. Every day that passed made me more and more ready when the night came to fling myself down and sleep like a log, and made me sleep longer and longer in the morning till at last I scarcely heard the whistle of the warder, which was the signal for us to start on our weary way again.

I believe, but for his dread of being parted from me, that Jean Leroy would have fallen by the way more than once. As it was I encouraged and helped him all I knew and all that I was able, and so enabled him to keep going all through that dreary march, until we at last passed under the great gates and within the walls of the *Bagne* at Toulon.

“I shall never come out of this place alive,” Jean Leroy murmured to me as we paused in the great court-yard for directions.

“Nonsense, lad. Pluck up your heart,” I said as cheerily as I could. “Perhaps you’ll get sent to hospital for a bit.”

He turned his haggard tear-stained, sun-

Grip

dried young face upon me. "Charley," he said, in a nervous whisper, "I want to keep close to you. I daren't give way and be ill. If we are near to each other, you so big and I so small, they will chain us together in the hope that you will kill me and that then they will *guillotine* you."

I laughed aloud.

"Nonsense. They want to get work out of us. Killing us would be a mistake."

"Do they?" he whispered, significantly.

I found out afterwards that he was not far wrong. However, his terror made him desperate and the strength of his despair kept him from giving way and breaking down. So, by great good luck—though I could see plainly enough by the faces of those in charge of us that it was meant brutally—we were coupled together.

Need I tell you what followed? Yes, but not in detail—oh, not in detail! I would myself forget it if I could. I would rather that those who love me should never know the full extent of the humiliation and degradation through which I went.

The first weeks were the worst—of ne-

The Unexpected

cessity! After a time the stronger ones got used to it and the weakly ones succumbed to the hardships of an existence which was worse than any hell that ever I heard of. At least, if the hell taught by the Churches be true, the condemned must have eternal strength given them to bear eternal punishment. In the hell which is called the *Bagne* of Toulon the torture was absolutely incommensurate with the physical strength of the tortured.

The poor lad, Leroy did not hold out against it long. He did his best, and I did mine to shield him from the consequences of his lack of strength and sheer inability to cope with the tasks which were allotted to him. I worked all the time for two, worked until my muscles grew like knotted ropes, until I ached as if I had been beaten all over, until when I was not wet through with dew or mist I was bathed in sweat. But it was all to no good. He was broken in nerve and feeble in frame—I did all the work, and he could not even keep pace with me. Our guards called him stupid and a skulker, and they flogged him even when

Grip

they must have known he was dying. And I had to stand by and see and hear, powerless to save him a single stripe. My God, will there be any hell hereafter which will equal in terror and brutality that which was devised by human beings like ourselves? I think not—I hope not!

As I said, he did not last long! Before the colder blasts of winter had set in, he was released from the chain and taken to hospital. I was allowed to see him before the end came, as he wished to charge me with a message to his mother, and I had also permission to write a letter to her for him, he being too far gone to hold a pen. It was a dreadful interview, and I thanked God when all was over and I saw the poor, haggard face set in that peace which could never be broken. He was so young, so weak, so frail! Perhaps his mother had not been judicious with him, as he had said—if so, it was he who bore the brunt, poor lad.

I was free of a chain-comrade for a few days, for there was no one available to couple me to. It was a relief to be free, even though I missed my poor lad so badly.

The Unexpected

Not that I grudged him his rest—oh, no ; it was better for him that he should have finished with it all and be at rest. He had no hope, no future, nothing to live for as I had.

My next comrade was a person of quite another kidney. His name, Anton La Roque ; his crime, robbery with violence ; his sentence, sixteen years ; and his disposition that of the most unmitigated blackguard who had ever fallen under my notice. How many times in the next year did I sigh for the poor lad whose worst failing had been his overwhelming weakness, who, with all his faults and his one crime, was an angel of light compared with the black devil called Anton la Roque.

He was not new to the *Bagne* : this was his second term, the first having been a comparatively short one. He was a determined skulker ; he would have led me the life of a dog if I had not been physically so much more than a match for him. As it was, though I had taken double my share for the sake of a dying lad, I made La Roque do his full whack, and this, perhaps

Grip

not unnaturally, made ill-blood between us. Still, I was so strong and I had such a fierce vindictive overpowering incentive to win through without a single misdemeanor, that when it came to a tussle he always got the worst of it. At last, however, he brought matters to an end, for I caught him one night filing stealthily at his fetters, and on my telling him that I would call the guard if he did not desist—for I had no desire to find myself a marked man or to have a taste of the *bastonnade*—he turned savagely on me and attempted to brain me with his file. Of course there was an outcry, for I closed with him and wrenched the file from him, and when the guard came hurrying up, gathering the main points of what had happened from the *forçats* around, he completed the uproar by striking the officer full in the face.

What need to tell the rest? He went to the *guillotine* and I was commended: and what was more important to me, I was free of a chain-comrade until a new gang of *forçats* should arrive from various parts of the country a week or ten days later.

The Unexpected

I thought little enough about La Roque after I had seen him pass to the *guillotine*. What was one villain more or less in the world? But I did think a good deal of what a lucky chance it had been that I had not been implicated in his endeavor to escape! How lucky that the *forçats* around had told the truth, for the old adage, "Honor among thieves," by no means held good in the *Bagne*. I wondered not a little eagerly what manner of man my next comrade would be, for one's comrade made all the difference between hell and comparative Heaven.

At last the new gang arrived, weary, foot-sore, unkempt, ill-conditioned, weather-stained, yet bringing with them a breath from the world—a free world wherein men came and went as they chose! How I longed for freedom, how my soul panted to be alone—quite alone—none but myself ever knew. My desire was only equalled by my longing to be revenged on the man who had wronged me, on the woman whose falsehood had brought me to that place.

And at last they came—the band of miser-

Grip

ables, who had yet to taste the most bitter waters of adversity. I and two others whose comrades had gone were brought in to the court-yard, where the smiths' forge was, to await our turn for new comrades.

“First man—Charles 'Yde,” called the officer in charge. I stepped forward. “First man's name?” he continued, to the officer in charge of the new arrivals.

“First man's name,” was the reply which fell upon my astonished ears like a clap of thunder—“*Desmond de Lancy!*”

Face to Face

CHAPTER X.

FACE TO FACE.

WHEN I heard the name of Desmond de Lancy as that of my future comrade of the chain I almost swooned away in the intensity of my excitement. So at last I understood why I had been deprived of my liberty and brought to that hell of torture and despair. After all, Heaven had been very good to me, and mine enemy was delivered into my hand. I could do with him even as I would—I could draw out the pains and penalties of revenge to as fine a nicety as I chose.

These and many other wild and exultant thoughts rang through my head, together with the beating of great drums, the rushing sound of many waters, the ding-dong of huge bells which first rang loud and clear, and then seemed to fade away into the far distance ; and when at last the sensation of

Grip

choking began to leave my throat, and the thick white mist to clear away from before my eyes, I saw that they had got De Lancy down upon the ground, and were already preparing for the *accouplement*, which would put him altogether at my mercy.

The *accouplement* was a humiliating and extremely unpleasant process, and De Lancy lay helplessly face down on the stones of the court-yard, his leg the while being held in position against the forge by the *forçat* who was assistant to the smith. He neither moved nor uttered a sound, and I stood by as impassively as I had stood by to see the blackguard, La Roque, flogged ; though, of course, it would not have been of the very smallest use for me to have moved a finger or spoken a single word, even had I desired to serve him ever so. As it was I stood by and saw—nothing more !

It happened sometimes that the smith was none too careful, the prisoner nervous, or the assistant careless, and that the *accouplement* was not made without accident. I did not know to which of the three causes one could attribute the *contretemps* of that

Face to Face

day, but in the course of the operation there was bungling or, maybe, spite, somewhere, and the result was that De Lancy got an ugly rap on the ankle bone, and after one groan lay motionless and fainting !

The officer in charge snarled angrily at the smith, and struck at him with his cane. But nobody troubled to examine the unfortunate De Lancy's bruise, and, as I was of necessity idle for the time, and as the place whereon he lay was required for the next prisoner, I was told to carry him to one side and see to him. It was the first absolutely congenial task which had been allotted to me since I had become a *forçat*.

I carried De Lancy to the side of the great court-yard where there was a well at which I could get some water, and I set him carefully down while I drew up the pail. I took a good look at him before I tossed some of the chill water over his face. I scanned his features carefully. Yes ; it was the same De Lancy, my enemy, the man who had robbed me of my heart's darling, whom I had never seen since I had watched him

Grip

with her in the jeweler's shop in the Hay-market. Yes, yes—it was the same, but how changed, how worn, how haggard he was! He had lost all the handsome looks which had won the heart of Margaret Eden from me, and was now thin and mean-looking to a degree. I looked down at my own strong healthy hands and compared them with his that were sickly white, and I wondered how Margaret could have chosen him of the two of us. Well, well, it was no use thinking about that—the day for dwelling upon Margaret Eden and love had gone by forever, and there remained for me no zest or interest in life but a great thirst for revenge, and here was my revenge actually in my hand, sent by Heaven itself.

I dipped my hand in the water and sprinkled his face freely. "Come," I said, roughly, for why should I leave him any longer to the luxury of unconsciousness? "Come, wake up," and I accompanied the words with a none too gentle shake.

With a sigh and a shiver he came back to himself again and stared up at me; but it was with the gaze of a complete and utter

Face to Face

stranger. "Who are you?" he asked, in French.

"Your comrade of the chain," I replied, in English.

He raised himself on his elbows and regarded me with a curiosity which betrayed the keenest interest. "What, an Englishman?" he exclaimed, "Yes, you look English! I, too, am half English; my mother was of your country."

I almost laughed in his face! How little he guessed that I knew all about his mother and about him, too, excepting such as had happened since I had been at Toulon.

"And—I—I—married an English lady," he went on, hesitating a little, while a deep scarlet flush dyed his worn face. "My—my wife—" but he could not finish the sentence, but hid his face on his arm as he lay on the ground by the well and I saw his shoulders heaving.

"Your wife is living?" I asked, in a cold hard voice, for when I had last heard definite news of Margaret—*my* Margaret—she had been dangerously ill.

Grip

“Yes ; thank God, she is alive,” he answered, raising his head again, though his eyes were wet. Then he devoutly crossed himself—the ignorant Papist that he was—and muttered something under his breath which I took to be a benediction. “I—I—feel that I shall never see her again in this life.”

“And you believe in another?” I inquired.

“Why, yes! Do not you?” he replied, simply.

“I doubt if any one believes much in anything here,” I said roughly. “Except that there is a hell, and that we have got to it before our time.”

“Ah !” and he gave a sigh as if he had already come to the same conclusion.

“What brought you here?” I asked. I sat on the edge of the well and he was still lying where I had first put him propped up against it.

He shrugged his shoulders. “I am a political prisoner,” he answered. “In what my crime consists it would be hard to say. For one thing, I am too favorable to your

Face to Face

nation ; for another I—I—objected to certain attentions being shown to my wife by one very high in station.”

“ You are jealous ? ”

“ No—not particularly. My wife,” and again he crossed himself, “ is very young, and she is very beautiful.”

He little guessed that I knew even better than himself exactly what was his wife’s age, and that I had watched her beauty unfold even from the days of her babyhood.

“ She is entirely devoted to me,” he continued, and then his voice broke, and he hid his face on his arm again.

I ground my teeth in silent rage, and he, choking down his emotion, looked up again. “ You see, she is so young,” he said, and he spoke as if he was yearning to talk things over with somebody, “ not twenty yet.”

I knew Margaret’s age to a nicety, but I kept the knowledge to myself. “ What is your term here ? ” I asked, as soon as I could command my voice.

“ Twelve years—and perpetual banishment.”

Grip

"So! Ah, well, since your wife is so young, she will doubtless console herself."

"Never!" he interrupted, fiercely.

"Twelve years is a long time out of a woman's life, and women—even the best of them—are fickle," I persisted.

"My wife is entirely devoted to me," he said, in a tone of firm conviction. "She will exist until I return. She will meet me in Heaven if I die here. And besides that —there is the child."

"Oh, there is a child?"

"Yes; our little son, just four months old when I left her. You don't know my wife; though you might know her, being a woman of your own country. There is no fickleness there. I would stake my soul on her faith and honor."

"It is a good deal to stake on so small a thing," I said, carelessly. "You think that you have been her only lover so far?"

"I know it," he broke in, passionately. "No man but myself has ever crossed her heart. I was the first, as I shall be the last."

So the jade had never told him even of

Face to Face

my existence. She had fooled him into thinking that his kisses had been the first ever pressed upon her lips, his eyes the first that had ever looked into hers with passion of love, his voice the only one that had ever whispered those fond vows to which all women listen sooner or later. As she had deceived me, so had she also deceived him. So doubtless she would betray him before long. I sat on the edge of the well and eyed him, my comrade in misfortune, doubly my comrade, though he did not know it. But though I did pity him in my heart, yet no thought of fore-going my coming revenge ever entered into my mind. Another moment and I should have disclosed myself to him, when all at once I was struck with the appalling difference between us. For never were two men more unlike. I big, strong, ugly, and godless—he small, slight, delicate, devout, and extremely handsome, though his beauty was worn. In one sense we had at last met face to face on equal terms—tied by a common chain: he a political prisoner, I, a foreigner, who had killed a man more or

Grip

less accidentally in a scuffle, and who was suffering, therefore, simply and solely because of my nationality. I had hidden my identity under an assumed name because I had been afraid that he might refuse to meet me did I challenge him with the shadow of a slur upon my name; and now that we had met at last, on a perfect equality so far as our standing in the world went, I could not but see that we were far less equal than we had been at any time, for I had won through the most difficult part of my time, and he was on the very threshold of his Gethsemane, with all the horrors of the worst right before him.

Of course any idea of challenging him to a duel was out of the question so long as we were, one or both of us, *forçats* at the *Bagne* of Toulon! We might fight, and one might kill the other; but where would be the satisfaction of killing a man so much my inferior, in a physical sense, as De Lancy, and, moreover, where would be the satisfaction when my reward would be the *guillotine*? I had no fancy either for killing De Lancy in a common fight or for

Face to Face

ending my own days under the knife of shame. No, no ; a fair fight and no favor between gentlemen of equal standing was one thing—murder and suicide belonged to a different category altogether.

It was not often that a *forçat* had the chance of a long, quiet talk and think. But for the next few hours De Lancy and I had nothing to do, because he, being a new comer into the *Bagne*, was entitled to a certain period of rest, and I, being his chain-companion, could not work without him. Moreover, I had been in the *Bagne* for nearly two years with not the faintest shadow of a misdemeanor against my name, and that did not count for nothing. Vile as the place was, suspicious as every official had come to be by that habit which is second nature, low cunning and uncertain as nine out of ten of the *forçats* were, I had yet won a good reputation both for my enormous strength and for my having from the first set my face against any underhand ways. I wished to get through my allotted time without a single black mark against my name, and, what was more, I meant to

Grip

carry it out. So it seemed as if they knew that the new *forçat* was safe with me, and they left us alone until mess-time.

Thus, while De Lancy got his breath lying in the sun against the side of the well, and I sat on the edge of it, I was able to think out the situation at my leisure. And the main thought which came to me was that my revenge was further off from me than ever! For a brief spell it had seemed to me as if Heaven itself had delivered him into my hand; reflection taught me that I was in search of an enemy, not of a victim. True, it was in my power to double his pains, to treble his torture, to quadruple his regrets, and to wreak my vengeance upon him in a thousand ways—in wretchedness and miseries untold. But, as I said, I sought an enemy, not a victim! And my enemy must be my equal—in skill, if not in physical strength! Between Desmond De Lancy and George Somers there could be no equality so long as we were bound by one common chain in the *Bagne* of Toulon.

Then a new thought presented itself to

Face to Face

me. I would keep silence as to my real self, I would continue to conceal my identity under the name of Charles Hyde—poor devil ! he had little thought how useful his name and passport would be to some one else when he had done with them—and I would constitute myself Desmond de Lancy's guardian, I would shelter and shield him, I would do for him what I had done for the poor lad, Jean Leroy. Coupled with the ordinary blackguard of the *Bagne*, it is doubtful whether a man of Desmond de Lancy's temperament would have lived six months ; as my comrade, I could spare him so much that his burden would be but the half of what it should have been. Yes ; I would shield him and save him—not for love as I had shielded the weak lad, Leroy, but for very hate, so that he should be there in good case when I had need of him. Then, years hence, when we were both free of this hell and out of this hated and detestable country, I would call on him, as one gentleman calls upon another, to give me the chance of wiping out with his heart's blood the wrong that he had done me.

CHAPTER XI.

FRIENDS AND COMRADES?

HAVING made up my mind to this course of action, I resolved to live up to the character of Charles Hyde in right good earnest. I told De Lancy that while we were chain-comrades I would do my best for him and that I would help him through. "Come now," I said, assuming, though I admit it was with an effort, a tone of rough friendliness, "it is getting near to mess-time. A new-comer like you would get next to nothing, for here feeding, like everything else, goes by might rather than right, and the weakest goes to the wall."

"What do they feed us on?" he asked indifferently.

"A filthy enough mess," I replied. "Beans, black bread, rancid oil—and biscuit full of weevils."

Friends and Comrades

“I don’t want any,” he said, and I saw that his unaccustomed stomach turned at the very thought of such food.

“Yes, but you will get over that,” I urged. “After a few days you will be as ready for your meals as the rest of us. Hunger is a fine sauce, comrade, and it is plentiful here. I must have my dinner if you have no objection, for it is ten chances to one that for the first week, I shall have to do your work as well as my own. And I strongly advise you to take your whack of the rations and to eat them, even if at first you have almost to choke yourself.”

He upheaved himself with a sigh and dragged himself across the court-yard beside me. He was unused to the chain and ring which encircled his ankle, and he walked as awkwardly as a bird which for the first time finds itself imprisoned by a string to the leg.

It happened that day that the contents of the mess-tub was more loathly than usual and I saw that his very gorge rose at it. I had no pity for him, not a bit; he had stolen my best chance of happiness from

Grip

me, and why should he be left all the days of his life to wallow in luxury and happiness. Why should he not taste of Gethsemane as others had done before him?

But it was not to my interest that he should go foodless and so run every risk of catching one or other of the pestilences which from time to time decimated the population of the *Bagne*. So I urged him to choke down a few mouthfuls and told him to show a brave front and be of good cheer, for he would get used to it by and by. "After all," I said, "what does one's mere meat and drink matter? It will be all the same a hundred years hence whether we have fed to-day off ortolans or beans cooked in rancid oil."

"I don't know," he returned. "There is a difference between a man who is well fed, and a man who is famished; just the difference between living and dying."

"Comrade," I said quietly, "those who sent you here, probably did so with an idea that the life would kill you, that you would die worn-out long before you had served half your time. So they will be rid of you

Friends and Comrades

and you will be out of their way and silenced for ever. Don't play into their hands. Say to yourself that you *will* live, no matter how hard the life ; that you *will* eat, no matter how poor the fare ; that you *will* drink, no matter how small the tipple."

He made but a sorry business of his dinner all the same and I gathered that he had kept a *chef* of no small reputation, so that the privation fell doubly hard upon him ! Not that it was for his food that he repined as the days went on and he was worn almost to skin and bone ; no, no, he was my enemy but I would do him full justice ; it was for his wife, the young wife whose beauty had been sufficient to send me headlong to the very devil, that he yearned ! I pitied him, yes, I pitied him even in those early days, for, much as he had wronged me, his case was even worse than mine ; she had been his wife for more than two years—she had never been more to me than a desire.

However, be the cause of a man disinclination to eat, work, live, what it will, it is all one to those who rule the roast at

Grip

such a place as the *Bagne* of Toulon. A certain amount of work is the portion of the *forçat*, and that work must be done so long as life remains. At the end of three days, when De Lancy was perceptibly weaker and less physically fit for work even than when he had arrived, we were ordered out to join our gang.

It was an absurdity—to speak half in jest—to put a man of De Lancy's physique and position to the work that was allotted to us that day. The main part of it fell upon me—or rather I might say that he was able to do no more than the merest semblance of labor. As a matter of fact, it was the hauling of great blocks of stone for the construction of a new dock, and at this work De Lancy was not only no good, he was an absolute detriment and only got in my way, hindering me from as easily doing the work of two as I could have done if I had been alone. He tried his best, poor creature, but he was weak yet from the horror and degradation of the long march, and he had not yet learned to manage the chain which bound us together, so that we

Friends and Comrades

were both in continual danger of being tripped up. However, I managed to save him from the consequences of so disastrous an accident as that would have been, and it was lucky for him that I did so, for the gang of men working together would bitterly have wreaked their vengeance on one who had been the cause of a reprimand from the *garde-chiourme* in charge of the party, and even my superior strength—for I was incomparably the strongest man of any class in the *Bagne*—would scarcely have served to save him.

“ Hyde—” he said to me when we had finished our day’s work and were safely locked up to the sloping boards which were all our bed—“ I shall never be able to keep on with this life. Think of going on for twelve years—”

“ Yes, I know,” I answered, “ it’s like an eternity when you see it ahead of you. But you’ve only got to live one day at a time, you know.”

“ But such days,” he said, with a shudder. “ Hyde, I shall never get out of this.”

“ So I felt just at first,” I told him sooth-

Grip

ingly. "I—I—wished a thousand things that were against all my ideas of right and wrong. But I've got almost used to it, you see."

"Have you? Well, yes, I suppose you have. But then you're such a splendid man—" looking up at me with evident admiration in his weary eyes. "Hyde, you are a fine figure of a man."

I laughed aloud, not the pleasant laugh of gratified vanity, but an echo from the place where the fiends dwell. He admired me! Well it is a droll world, and the people in it are a goodly match for the world they live in.

"Oh, you may laugh," he said, in his weary voice, "but it's true and you know it. There's not a man here who can hold a candle to you, while I am like a shrimp beside you. And yet—yet—"

"You are attractive enough to some people;" I put in, "far more attractive than my inches and red ugliness would ever be."

"How quick you are!" he murmured. "How could you know that I was thinking of her?"

Friends and Comrades

“It was easy to take your meaning,” I replied carelessly.

“You are so quick,” he exclaimed, the note of admiration deepening. “And, Hyde, you are better than that. You’re such a good fellow.”

I said nothing! What could I say? I hated him more than ever. I loathed him. I rejoiced in his presence because the mere fact of his being a *forçat* like myself had made us equal. If he had only been a Hercules as I was, I would have revelled in every little awkwardness into which he was betrayed, in every twitch of the chain, in every stumble he made; I would have revealed myself to him and I would have added the pleasures of my anticipation to all the other pains and penalties to which he was doomed. As it was, I kept my own counsel and held my peace, allowing him to go on in his blind ignorance, believing that I was a good fellow, even expressing his admiration for my superior size and strength.

And yet, how little he knew me, how admirably I must at that time have concealed

Grip

my real feelings ; for we were from the hour of our first talk by the well-side friends and comrades. Friends and comrades ! Such friendship as Judas might have felt for the Man of Sorrows, such *camaraderie* as the *forçats* around us showed for one another when they sold each other to stripes or even to death !

Still, although I was, I admit, actuated by the basest and meanest of motives, by the most deadly and virulent passion by which the human race is capable of being moved, I played the part of friend and comrade as thoroughly and as effectually as if I had been possessed only of a desire to further his interests and to save him as much as possible from pain and tribulation. We were friends and comrades, I bore his labors and stood between him and a thousand woes, and he—*he loved me !*

But he did not make good progress either in health or in growing accustomed to the daily life of the *Bagne*. For one thing, he could not eat,—day after day I saw that he sickened at the very sight of the mess which was set before him ; day after day he left his

Friends and Comrades

portion or I ate it, and the result was that with each day he grew visibly weaker and less able to keep pace with me, even though I did all the work.

“De Lancy,” I said to him at last, “if you don’t make an effort to get used to your life here, you will die.”

“I begin to think I shall,” he replied wearily. “I—I can’t help it, Hyde.”

“You can help it if you try,” I said quietly. “A *man*,” laying a very distinct emphasis on the word, “can bring himself to do anything. It is unworthy of you—an aristocrat—a gentleman—to let yourself be snuffed out like that poor lad, Jean Leroy, who was with me first.”

“You did your best for him, Hyde.”

“Yes—I did. But he was hopeless—his career was over; he had no hope, nothing to look forward to except starvation and disgrace. He would have gone out of this a marked man, incapable of earning an honest living, and too cowardly to earn one by wickedness! It was better for him that he died, poor lad, death was a merciful release, an easy way out of all his troubles.

Grip

With you it is different. You are a political prisoner—your caste remains unbroken—your place in the world outside of France, aye, and possibly in it, if the Government should be changed, would not be touched by your imprisonment here. You have plenty of money, and plenty of interest in life."

"You mean my wife—my child." He broke in almost eagerly. "Yes, Hyde, you are right. You are right. And my wife is lovely enough to draw a man through a worse quagmire of desolation and despondency than this is. You are right! I have a wife, a child, they are worth living for—you would say so ten times more if you only knew her."

"But you *do* know her," I said dryly.

"So that I ought to keep her remembrance ever before me," he ended. "Yes—yes—it is true, so true; only she seems such a long way off, as if she were in another world altogether, as if I should get to her the easiest by slipping all the fetters of this world and just waiting till she came to me there."

Friends and Comrades

“But you don’t *know* that she will ever come to you in another world,” I said, trying to rouse him from this lethargy, which I considered a highly dangerous symptom ; “you don’t *know* that there will be any other world.”

“If not, I shall then know nothing,” he replied, turning his bright eyes upon me with such a look as made me feel all at once, that he was going to slip through my fingers, after all. “And it would be better to know nothing, to have the blessed peacefulness of oblivion than to go on like this. I am a good Catholic,” he went on, crossing himself devoutly ; “I believe in the consolations of religion, but I have never wholly understood the fear and dread that the priests tell us all men have of extinction. One had better be *nothing* than suffer.”

“But are you not too proud, you, an aristocrat, to let such scum as these people here get the better of you ?” I cried, trying to rouse him otherwise.

“I was proud once,” he answered in a tired voice. I watched him for a while

Grip

after he had fallen into a troubled doze that night, and wondered whether in truth his spirit was too thoroughly broken to be roused again. By the light of the feeble lamp swinging overhead—for we were never left in darkness, darkness like a cloak covering a multitude of sins—he certainly had the appearance of a man marked for death. His face was wan, his complexion was waxen, his frame emaciated and the hollows in his temples very deep and all athrob. I felt that he was slipping away and that I could do nothing to stay the journey ! Then a desperate question put itself before me : Should I, could I, by virtue of my good character and the mark of commendation against my name, seek to have an interview with the Commandant ? Should I tell him boldly that as things were then going, De Lancy, was little, if anything better, than a dead man ?

What served to rouse him out of his apathy was the arrival of a letter which he received at the end of his first three months of imprisonment.

Of course, it was from his wife, from

Friends and Comrades

Margaret, and he read it with trembling hands and tear-stained eyes. And then he thrust it away in the breast of his hideous red waistcoat as if it was a treasure of which all the world would wish to deprive him.

“You had no letter, Hyde,” he said to me in his gentlest tone.

“I never have letters,” I replied.

“Never! Why, what are your people thinking of?”

“Of anything rather than that I am here,” I said. “Probably that I am dead.”

“Then they don’t know?”

“No—and they never will if I can help it. Only one person holds any clue to my whereabouts—and when I am free, I mean to silence him unless he silences me, when it won’t matter whether they know or not.”

“Poor devil,” said my enemy in a voice full of pity. “What did he do to offend you?”

CHAPTER XII.

BY A SIDE-WIND.

I COULD not refrain from laughing when De Lancy put that question to me—“What did he do to offend you?” The whole stituation was so inexpressibly droll.

“He wronged me,” I answered. “And there are some wrongs which can only be wiped out in blood.”

“That is so,” he admitted. Then he put his hand into his bosom where the letter from Margaret was, as if it was something that would be as a shield and a charm to him.

“Hyde—” he said at last with a curious hesitancy—“you have not asked me for any news; I—I—mean—don’t you take an interest?”

“God knows I do that,” I returned quickly, and it was true enough.

He did not say anything for a minute or

By a Side-Wind

so ; then he looked up with a strange radiance in his eyes. " Hyde," he said, " you have been very good to me—you have spared me and saved me; without you I should have sunk under the life here, and I should have died weeks ago. You put new life, new heart into me. I feel now that there is a possibility of getting through this hell and of seeing my wife again, my wife and my child, who is as if he has no father. I can do little or nothing for you as long as we are here—but—but can show you my letter."

He drew it from his breast and offered it to me. I put out my hand. " Nay," I said, " put up your letter—I don't want to read it; it's yours and yours alone. It would only aggravate me. I have no one to write such letters to me, you know."

He put the letter back in his breast again with a deep breath, as if he was thankful that I had refused to take advantage of his sacrifice. I must admit that I had not been swayed only by unselfishness in doing so, because, in truth, I had no desire " to look into happiness through an-

Grip

other man's eyes." And wretched as De Lancy's plight was, his satisfaction and happiness in his letter were simply unbounded. My case was bad enough, my isolation sufficiently complete, without my deliberately doing that which would make my time of waiting almost impossible of support, well-nigh unbearable. And the letter was from Margaret!

Yet I felt that I must speak. I must say something.

"You have good news?" I asked.

"Yes—as good as could be! My wife is well—as well, she says, as she will ever be till I am with her again. And the child is thriving grandly. You see the strong Yorkshire air—"

"What, she is in Yorkshire?" I ejaculated.

"She writes from Thorpe-Hutton, her father's place," he replied, all unsuspecting of what his words had conveyed to me. "When I was arrested, I wished her to go home. I knew that she would be safest among her own people, whatever might befall me. She says it is a beautiful place."

By a Side-Wind

“You have never been there ?”

“Never ! We came to France as soon as we were married, and we never went over to England again. For one thing Margaret was ill in the early days of our life together. And then the following summer all her family came over to France and stayed with us on my estate on the Rhone in Ardêche. We had talked of going back to England at this time, and of spending Christmas at Thorpe-Hutton. However, it was not to be, and my poor Margaret returned to her old home worse than a widow. She says I cannot imagine how strange it is to her to be back in all the haunts of her childhood, with only the baby to remind her that the past is not all a dream.”

I did not answer ! We were enjoying the midday hour of rest. I was sitting on a block of stone which we were engaged in shaping, and De Lancy was sitting on the ground, his back propped against a similar block. So I sat there amid the unlovely surroundings of a prison stone-yard, while my mind conjured up a vision of Margaret

Grip

as I had seen her last, of Margaret once more flitting in and out of the wainscotted rooms at Thorpe-Hutton, of Margaret passing down the great avenue of chestnuts, of Margaret sitting in the great square pew of the little old church with its dumpy tower and walls of yellow ochre! It was too painful a picture, and I shook myself free of such recollections with a gesture of impatience.

“They are very gay in those quiet Yorkshire places,” I said, seeing that he was looking at me in surprise. I felt constrained to say something and I blurted out the first thought that came into my mind.

“So she says; but she is going nowhere as yet. She tells me—but listen—‘The only place I have been to by way of visiting is to Somersley, which belongs to Sir Robert Somers, who is my father’s nearest neighbor and greatest friend. I don’t think I shall go again. The girls are both married and not often there, and only Wynne, the youngest boy of all, is at home. He is preparing for the Church, as there are livings to think of. The dear old Squire is a

By a Side-Wind

good deal altered since William's death; and George, the third son—the one who used to be my old sweetheart—is abroad; and they, the girls, who were both at home for Christmas, warned me not to ask for him, as Sir Robert has never forgiven him for selling out of the Service for some unexplained reason. My conscience smites me sorely about poor George, and I scarce liked to look Sir Robert in the face. He was just the same to me, you know, excepting that he is so dull and unlike his old self. His sister-in-law, Miss Greville, whom we have always called "Aunt Eliza," was very stiff with me, and but gave me the tips of her fingers. Poor old lady, I dare-say she thinks it a terrible disgrace to have a husband a political prisoner. Anyway, I don't think that I shall go over to Somersley again for a long time. My little Claude is company enough for me.'"

I heard it all, the news of my own home and my own people, without, I believe, moving so much as a muscle of my face. So Rachel was married—I wondered to whom? And Bill was dead—good, steady,

Grip

kind old Bill—and I knew not when he had died, nor from what cause! And Sir Robert, my good old father, was so changed that Margaret hardly knew him; he never spoke of me. Bluff and sturdy Aunt Eliza was still to the front, and she had not forgotten the past, nor brought herself to be over and above civil to the girl who had wronged me. Good old Aunt Eliza! She was faithful and true to her graceless godson, even though more than two years had gone by since she had heard a single word of me. Dear old Aunt Eliza! I knew as well as if I had actually been at Somersley, that there was no thought in her mind of disgrace or of imprisonment, but that Margaret's first offence, that of slighting me, was still in her mind. And Margaret had not wholly forgotten—her conscience was tender.

“Then there was another lover?” I said, feeling that he was waiting for me to speak.

“Well, scarcely a lover. A boyish sweetheart—nothing to touch her heart,” he said, carelessly.

By a Side-Wind

“Or his!” I rejoined. I could not help speaking bitterly.

“Possibly. Anyway, in these matters the men must abide by the lady’s wishes! If he was the kind of young man who could abandon his career, and break his father’s heart because the girl he fancied preferred another, he was certainly not fit to be the husband of any young girl, to say nothing of her being one of so sensitive and so dependent a nature as Margaret’s. Oh, I don’t waste much pity over him, I assure you. Ah,” with a heavy sigh “there is the whistle.”

In another moment the great yard was all astir with *forcats* getting to work again, and we too had no further time for conversation. But I had leisure, aye, and to spare, for thinking, and my thoughts were all bitter as I chipped and chipped at the great block of stone. So he had no pity to waste over Margaret’s early lover! In such matters men must abide by the lady’s wishes! And he could even, from his position of abject wretchedness and humilia-

Grip

tion, find scathing words of condemnation and reproof for me !

I looked at him as he awkwardly plied his tools, and I hated him more than ever ! How dared he be the one to judge me, and to judge me out of his knowledge of me, which was but partial, and acquired at second-hand ? I hated him—I hated him ! My whole soul seemed to rise up in arms and to revolt against the idea of doing another hand's turn to serve him, even though it was to save him for the purposes of my own vengeance.

Thus I became more and more set on one day meeting De Lancy face to face and on terms of absolute equality, of demanding my chance of wiping out my wrong in blood. I conquered myself of the almost irresistible inclination to do nothing more to help him, of the impulse to declare my identity and to avow myself his open enemy, and by the time we had ceased work for the day, I was to all outward seeming his friend and comrade as of yore.

True, I had left him almost alone, and he was tired out by the time we had got

By a Side-Wind

back to the long vestibule in which we ate our appetizing supper. And later, when we were once more chained up to our bed of planks, he sank off to sleep, a happy smile on his face, his hand clutching at his breast where the letter was! I leaned on my elbow watching him for a long time; and how I hated him! I believe, too, that I hated *her*!

I did not sleep much that night! You see, I had, by a side-wind it is true, been unexpectedly brought in touch with my own people and my home life. I had existed for two years almost content to be without letters and without news of them; but now that the ice was once broken, I yearned fiercely for something more, for a letter of my own, for a direct communication with my own kith and kin!

As I watched him, he started in his sleep and such a smile of surprise and delight overspread his face that I knew he was dreaming of Margaret. And I was almost sorry that my sense of honor was too strong for me to throttle the life out of him as he lay.

Grip

As the days went by I consoled myself with the idea that it would be at least three months before any fresh news could come to me, or before I could be tortured in the same way again. But I was wrong! I had forgotten that De Lancy had permission to write to his wife at stated times and it was not very long before the first of these indulgences came due.

The greater part of the wretched denizens of the *Bagne* could neither read nor write and were therefore obliged to call in the good offices of a letter-writer. De Lancy, naturally not being one of these, wrote his own letter and spent several hours—the precious midday hour for repose—over it. “They will read every word of it,” I reminded him.

“They may—I have said nothing that could be called incriminating,” he replied.

“Don’t say much about me.”

“Why not!”

“Because if you say much they may separate us.”

“I never thought of that. I was going to tell my wife everything that you have

By a Side-Wind

done for me. But the risk is too great. Hyde, what should I do without you?"

"We won't go into that, comrade," I said quietly.

He went on with his letter, writing very closely, so as to use up every scrap of his allowance of paper. And when he had finished, he said to me—"I have told her nothing excepting that my chain-comrade is an Englishman and that his name is Charles Hyde."

"That is good. By the way, do you write in French or in English?

"In French. Were I to write in English, the letter would have to go to the translator and would probably be stopped. My wife speaks and understands French perfectly.

I pondered not a little, wondering what Margaret would think if she knew that her letter had sent news of his family to her first sweetheart, George Somers? How intense would be her astonishment could she but learn that the Charles Hyde, who was her husband's chain-comrade, was none other than the playfellow of her

Grip

young days, the George Somers whose father never spoke of him and for whose sake my doughty old Aunt Eliza had scarce given her a finger in greeting. Well, she would know some day ; till then, I would wait. As I had waited in the past, so would I in the present patiently abide until the time was ripe.

Days, and Weeks, and Months

CHAPTER XIII.

DAYS, AND WEEKS, AND MONTHS !

IT must not be imagined that having got over the first few weeks of life in the *Bagne*, De Lancy went straight on and settled down quietly to getting through his time ; far from it. Indeed, from time to time, it seemed as if he had neither heart nor strength to go on, and that he would find it a positive relief to feel his head under the knife of the *guillotine*.

“I cannot stand the food,” he said to me over and over again. “I cannot stand the monotony, the eternal round which never changes and makes one day so like another that one does not know if it is to-day or to-morrow. The continual attitude of subserviency—and subserviency to such brutes too. I cannot stand out against it any longer.”

Grip

"You *must* stand out against it," I urged upon him one day.

"No—I cannot. Only this morning that brute struck at me with his cane because I did not move fast enough to please his greatness. You saw it for yourself, Hyde."

"Yes, I saw it. How could I help it?" I replied.

"If I had been free," he muttered between his teeth, "I would have cracked his head for him. Gad, I would."

"When I was free I did indulge myself in cracking a policeman's skull," I remarked. "And here I am in consequence. I've wished the skull whole again a-many times, I promise you."

"Besides—" he went on, stretching himself wearily—"I should at least have the satisfaction of making an end of Pierre Lebrun."

"And of going to the *guillotine* yourself," I rejoined quickly. "And where would be the satisfaction in that? I can quite understand your wife's feeling that there is no disgrace in your being a political prisoner, and her feeling the foolishness of my—I

Days, and Weeks, and Months

mean that I can quite understand your wife feeling that it was foolish of the lady whom she fancied met her coldly on that account. But to have a husband a political prisoner is one thing, and to have a husband who died under the *guillotine*, for insubordination and mutiny against recognized authority, is quite a different matter."

He did not speak for a few minutes, so I went on. "You don't happen to have seen a flogging here yet," I said. "I have. You're a gentleman, half an Englishman; I don't want to see you flogged as they flogged that poor lad, Leroy. And they must have known that he was dying," I added.

Somehow, my heart always went down when I thought of the past and of the weak lad's sufferings at, save the mark, the hands of justice! In a moment my mind had conjured up the vision of his ghastly face bleached by fear and pain of every vestige of color, of his poor narrow cringing rabbit's back torn and scored by the cruel thong of the tar-plaited whip! And

Grip

I had stood by, in silence perforce, because I could not, must not interfere, for by so doing I should only have added further punishment to him, who could so ill bear what had been apportioned out to him already. De Lancy knew my feeling pretty well on this subject and the pain it was to me to cast my memory back over that part of my life, and after a while he spoke.

“ Hyde—” he said, in a shaking voice—“you are a good fellow, the best I have ever known in all my life.”

“ No—don’t say that,” I said hurriedly.

“ But I do say it—I mean it. I don’t like to think what sort of plight I should be in if I were here without you, without you to act as a check upon my wrong-headedness. Forgive me, Hyde. I’ll do my best for your sake.”

So the temptation to break out was tided over once more and De Lancy went on with the struggle. I worked with desperate energy at this time so that too much should not fall upon him, for in his poor state of health, with his nerves all shattered and his heart always yearning fiercely for

Days, and Weeks, and Months

freedom and his wife, he was always in danger of breaking out anew and of committing himself to what would have been certain death. There was one great advantage in the companionship of the chain, which was a great set-off against the disadvantage of being more or less at the mercy of another man's will day and night. It was that I was always at his elbow, so that he was not given opportunities of getting into trouble, as he would probably have done had I not been by to speak a warning word or to lay a restraining hand on his arm when I saw the scarlet danger-signals mounting to his face.

In spite of his English blood—and the English are supposed to keep cool heads on all occasions—his temperament had much in it of his Southern race ; he never learned to control himself. He did manage to keep himself under control, but never on his own initiative.

Now I, on the contrary, had above all things learned endurance. At home, at Somersley, they had always called me hot-tempered, and my father had more than

Grip

once shaken his head over me and had said—"George—George—I don't know what that headlong nature of yours will bring you to!" Well, it had brought me to the *Bagne* of Toulon, and I many a time thanked God that Sir Robert did not know it.

Still, if my ill-luck had done nothing else, it had taught me to perfection how to endure; a hot temper and impatience of restraint might have brought me to the *Bagne*, but the *Bagne* had taught me how to accept ill-fortune with the coolness of a stoic; it had taught me to pass by insult and contumely with a face betraying nothing of the inward fury which possessed me; it had taught me perfect command of myself.

I can scarcely explain how strange and conflicting were my feelings towards De Lancy! I was torn in opposite ways, I was actuated by my hatred, which had grown to be as a part of myself, the one thing that I had to live for, the only thing which had made me, from the very moment of my unfortunate encounter with the *gens de*

Days, and Weeks, and Months

police, Jean Duval, set myself to one steady end and aim; and on the other hand, I was moved by my profound pity for his weakness and his pride, both of race and place, which made it difficult,—difficult, aye and almost impossible,—for him to cringe and bow to men who were in every sense his inferiors. Through many weary days and weeks, I was conscious that, but for the deadly hatred which flourished in my heart, I should have loved De Lancy as I had never known what it was to love the poor craven lad, Jean Leroy. In my feeling towards him pity had been akin to love; as regards Desmond de Lancy the sentiment was ever uppermost that if I hated him myself, I yet did not wish to see him put upon or maltreated by others. I had the hatred of a gentleman for a gentleman—but when these prison scum came in, I had first of all the instinctive sense that men of class must stand by one another.

So the days and weeks went on, their monotony unbroken excepting by horrors, for if I had apparently got well used to the life of the *Bagne*, if I had succeeded in

Grip

quelling outbreak after outbreak as they arose in the hot Southern heart of my comrade of the chain, others there were and in plenty who found existence so wholly insupportable that they were glad to end it in any way ! There was only one way in the *Bagne* of Toulon !

At last the time came round for De Lancy to receive another letter, or I should more correctly say that the time came round when he should by rights have received his third letter since his arrival at Toulon. The time for the second one had passed in silence and disappointment, but when the end of another three months drew near and De Lancy had almost persuaded himself that Margaret had forgotten him, that she was ill, even dead,—any and every excuse excepting that of faithlessness,—a letter came.

“ Hyde,” he said to me, “ I dare not open it.”

“ Nonsense ! You know the writing ? ”

“ It is from her.”

I laughed aloud, the bitter laugh that his mention of Margaret always provoked.

Days, and Weeks, and Months

“Tush, man, don’t be faint-hearted. If ‘tis good news, you will be the better for it ; if bad, the quicker ‘tis over the better.”

His hands trembled violently as he opened the closely-written sheet, and he began to read with eager eyes, throwing out little scraps of information as he scanned the words. “She is well—praise to God—Yes—she did write. Concludes as she has not heard that her letter was stopped. Ah, the brutes, how could they have the heart to do it ?”

So he read his letter, and then, just as he was getting near to the end, he turned to me, with quite a new expression on his face and said,—“Hyde—are you one of the Hydes of Pakenfield ?”

CHAPTER XIV.

FRIENDS OUT OF THE UNKNOWN.

WHEN De Lancy asked me that plain question—"Are you one of the Hydes of Pakenfield?"—I felt all on a sudden as if the very world was crumbling away from beneath my feet.

I had, however, sufficient presence of mind to answer him without showing the consternation which I truly felt.

"Pakenfield?" I said, "I never heard of the place. No, I don't belong to that family. What makes you ask?"

"My wife says—'Try to find out if your comrade is a Hyde of Pakenfield! I met a Mrs. Hyde a few weeks ago who is in great anxiety about her only son, who is called Charles Hyde. He went abroad—to Paris—about two and a half years ago, and she has absolutely lost sight of him.

Friends Out of the Unknown

There is a large estate depending on him and it will pass to a cousin if the son does not return. But at present all is at a standstill, and, as Mrs. Hyde says, she is broken-hearted, hoping always against hope, not daring either to look for the best or to acknowledge the worst.' "

I had no doubt at all in my own mind that the young man whom this lady sought was the Charles Hyde under whose passport and whose name I had hidden my identity. But situated as I was, I did not see that I could very well say so. Of course, I was extremely sorry for the poor lady's anxiety and any information that I had to give was not such as would tend to make her any the happier. For Charles Hyde was dead—had indeed died before I ever heard of him.

True, my little Israelitish friend, Jules Ferrand, probably knew how and when and where he had come by his end, and it did not suit me nay, rather, it was absolutely impossible for me to put the lady in communication with Jules Ferrand. Probably the direct result of such a course would

Grip

have been that I should have found myself indicted on a fresh charge and have been condemned to a new term of the *travaux forcés*, which would assuredly not run conjointly with that which I was, at that very moment, working out. And though I had been trained from my childhood in gallantry towards the fair sex, I did not see my way to carrying the principle so far as that.

“I am sure I am very sorry for the poor lady,” I said with a concerned air, “but indeed I am not the young man she seeks. For some, nay, for many things I wish I were, for I should at least have an estate of my own to go home to instead of being, as I am, never likely to have greater landed interest than to the extent of six feet by three. Of course, as a matter of fact whoever undertakes the office of providing me with a grave will have actually to endow me with a few inches more, but that is beside the question. Pray tell your wife, when you write to her again, to disabuse the poor lady’s mind of any lingering hope she may have that in me she has found a clue to her son’s whereabouts. My father was a coun-

Friends Out of the Unknown

try gentleman unable to give me either estate or any considerable sum of money to my fortune, and I have not a single Hyde relation in all the world."

"But you have relations?" he said questioningly.

"Oh, yes, but they are not called Hyde."

"I see; you have relations on your mother's side. Is your mother living?"

"No. She died many years ago."

"Ah! And you have lost your father too," he said pityingly.

I had never said so, but I let the remark pass without comment; it made no difference to him whether my father was living or dead.

"I have often wondered," he went on dreamily, "how it was that you never spoke of your people or of your past life. Now, I have told you everything that there is to tell about myself, all about my own place, my youth, my experiences in England, my wife and her family, everything. Why is it that you have never put any confidence in me?"

"I never have anything to tell," I replied.

Grip

"I did not think that you would find my past interesting."

"Everything outside these walls is interesting," he rejoined bitterly. "Hyde, I hope with all my heart, that I have not wearied you."

"Not the least in the world. On the contrary, I have always been deeply interested in everything that you have told me."

It was true enough, and he murmured something to the effect that he was glad. "I am not a communicative man," I went on. "My disposition is altogether different to yours, I don't feel any desire to unburden myself to any one."

"Ah, you are a lucky fellow in one sense, you have nothing of which to unburden yourself."

I did not argue the point; where would have been the good? But I repeated my assertion that I was not Charles Hyde of Pakenfield and that I had never in all my life heard of the place, and added, that I hoped he would ask his wife to set the poor lady's mind at rest on the subject without the de-

Friends Out of the Unknown

lay of a moment after she received the intelligence. He promised that he would do so, but reminded me that some weeks would elapse ere he would have leave to write. "But you, Hyde," he suggested eagerly, "you have never written a letter since you came to this place. Why do not you write to my wife? It would set the poor lady's mind at rest a good deal sooner and it would give my wife news of me."

I laughed outright, for the idea of *my* writing to Margaret in order that she might have news a little sooner of her husband was extremely droll! Besides, the caligraphy would betray me at once; Margaret would not have forgotten the handwriting of her old sweetheart—and—and—anyway, I could never bring myself to do it. "No, comrade, no, I would rather not put pen to paper here. A *forçat* like myself, has no right to address a lady and without permission. It is very sad that my namesake's mother should remain in suspense, but it cannot be helped; she must wait until you write to your wife again."

"You need not think of that. I will

Grip

answer for it that your letter will be welcome."

"Yes, yes, but it is quite impossible for me to do it."

"Well, if you would rather not——" he began, when I cut the discussion short.

"Truly, I would rather not," I said, and I spoke in a tone which admitted of no further argument.

De Lancy said not a single word more, but swallowed down his disappointment like the gentleman he was. I hated him, he had ruined my life, but I am bound to say as I was fain to confess to myself then, that he was a gentleman "core through," as Yorkshire folk say.

Still, although I thought that I had disposed of any further questioning concerning Charles Hyde of Pakenfield, I was altogether mistaken. A few weeks had gone by, the time when De Lancy might write a letter had come and the letter had been written and despatched, when one day, towards the end of the long afternoon, an urgent summons came for us to go immediately to the Commandant's bureau !

Friends Out of the Unknown

“Something has happened,” said De Lancy.

“Nothing unusual has happened here, so unless they want some information out of one of us, it must be something from outside,” I replied.

“Hyde,” he said, in a tremulous voice, “do you think *she* is dead?”

“No—they would not take the trouble to break such news as that. You would hear in the ordinary way through a letter,” I replied. “Why, man, you are shaking! Pluck up your spirit and wait till you know the worst.”

I said everything that I could to reassure him as we went towards the Commandant’s bureau in charge of our warder, Pierre Lebrun. He entered the lobby before us and, knocking at the door, awaited the order to enter. Then he bade us by a gesture pass in and, following himself, closed the door behind us, waiting at attention until the Commandant should speak. I saw that there were two ladies, one a good deal older than the other, sitting on the other side of the bureau, while on the

Grip

Commandant's table there lay a very official looking paper to which were attached several seals.

"Which of these men is Charles Hyde?" the Commandant asked. He called it 'Sharl 'Yde' and I know that he knew us both particularly well, especially De Lancy, who was a political prisoner of great importance. It was, however, his way of making De Lancy feel that he was one of a crowd and that his identity had been completely blotted out.

Pierre Lebrun indicated that I was the person alluded to and the older of the two ladies gave a sigh and said—"This is not my son—oh, no!" and then the tears came into her eyes and she whipped out her handkerchief and presently said : "Gine-vra ask him—tell him why we came ! Tell him that I have promised not to talk to him in English."

The younger lady explained to me in fairly fluent French—the French of an Englishwoman—that Mrs. Hyde had been seeking news of her son for nearly three years and that hearing of my name from

Friends Out of the Unknown

Madame la Comtesse de Lancy, she had with great difficulty obtained permission to visit the prison in order to satisfy herself beyond any possibility of doubt, as to whether it was her son who was there or not.

"I am very sorry, madame," I replied, "that I am not this lady's son, though possibly she would rather find him anywhere else than here."

"My aunt is sorry too, for she has sought her son for a long, long time and suspense is very hard to bear," the young lady said sorrowfully.

"Ask him whether he is any connection of the Hydes of Pakenfield, Ginevra," put in the older lady eagerly.

The lady whose name was Ginevra repeated the question in French. I replied in the same tongue—which, by that time, I spoke fluently, and owing to my companionship with De Lancy, with a perfect accent—that to my knowledge I was not in any way connected with the family at Pakenfield.

"But he is a gentleman, Ginevra," the old lady broke in.

Grip

I admitted that I had been born of a respectable position in life.

“Ask him what he did to get himself here, Ginevra?”

“Madame,” I said bowing, after the question had duly been repeated to me in French, “I had the misfortune to knock the skull of a *gens de police* against the wall, and, to my regret, I knocked it a little too hard.”

“What, you killed him?” exclaimed the young lady, asking a question for the first time on her own initiative.

“I am sorry to say I did,” I returned politely.

I did not altogether see why she should want to be asking me, whom she had never seen before, questions about my purely private concerns. However, she repeated both question and answer to the aunt, who made such a sturdy comment thereon, that I felt quite sorry that I could not claim some sort of kinship with her.

“Pah,” she remarked scornfully. “I have no doubt that the policeman richly deserved it. Policemen should not be so keen of interfering with gentlemen. I am

Friends Out of the Unknown

sure my poor Charley would very much have resented a policeman's interfering with him. Tell this young gentleman, Ginevra, that I sympathize with him in his present situation very much, and that if, when he is free, I can do anything to serve him, he need only write to me at Pakenfield, Gloucester, and I am at his service, for my dear boy's sake."

I waited until all this, or rather I should say the latter part of this, had been translated to me before I bowed and said that I would remember her kindness with gratitude all my life.

"And tell him, Ginevra," the old lady went on, "that for my dear boy's sake, my dear boy who has the same name as his, I would like to make him a present—it will come useful to him here." As she spoke she held out a purse of dark blue silk with gold rings and gold tassels at either end, through the meshes of which gold was also shining. I made a gesture of refusal. "God bless you for your kind thought, madame, but I cannot take money from you," I said huskily.

Grip

"Nay, but take it. It will be a comfort to my aunt and to her friend who sent her here, to feel that you have not refused the only gift it was possible to make you just now. Do not refuse her."

I hesitated and looked towards the Commandant for instructions. He caught my look and perhaps he remembered that I was a highly commended prisoner. Anyway, he put up his hand with a debonnaire gesture—Frenchmen always play up before the women—and said gruffly, "But certainly, take the little gift the lady is kind enough to offer you. *Mon Dieu*, but our *forçats* are getting too scrupulous for expression."

I thrust the dainty purse into my bosom and bowed low to the old lady. "Will you say to madame," I said to the one who was called Ginevra, "that her kindness touches me to the quick. When I am free, I will seek her out, for I may be able to serve her. Meantime, I am as much her servant as a prisoner at the *Bagne* can be."

Friends Out of the Unknown

“Very prettily turned for an Englishman,” remarked the Commandant with a sneer. “You can go.”

CHAPTER XV.

PARTED.

DE LANCY'S eyes were blazing with excitement when we got back to our own quarters again and he turned upon me almost fiercely. "Hyde," he said eagerly, "my wife made that purse."

"Very likely," I answered. "But wait till we are alone and unobserved so that we can examine it. It is likely enough that we may discover some clue hidden away to tell us. If we look at it now, we may soon find ourselves done out of it all."

"Anyway, the money is yours—but if she made it, Hyde, I would like to have the purse."

"It is all yours." I returned.

"No—no. I won't have a penny of it, not so much as a penny," he declared eagerly.

"For the other, wait till all is quiet."

Parted

We talked a good deal of the poor disappointed lady who was seeking her son, and De Lancy remarked on the strangeness of our names being so precisely similar. "Your age too," he added.

"Hyde is a common enough name in England," I said, with an assumption of complete indifference. "And Charleses grow like blackberries on a bramble-bush."

At last when the *Bagne* was all fairly quiet and we were as free from observation as we ever were, I drew the purse from my bosom, and taking great care that the coins which it contained should not chink one against another, examined the contents. As I expected there was a roll of gold Napoleons at one end, and at the other a little case of gilt cardboard, with a Napoleon stuck at either end, so as to form a tiny receptacle between. "This is for you," I said, handing it to him.

He wrenched it open with eager fingers and drew out a letter closely written on very thin paper. "A letter," he said in his most eager voice. "I knew it. And without surveillance."

Grip

He read it, nay, devoured it would be a better word, giving me bits of information as he read. "Yes—she worked it herself—I knew it, Hyde, I knew it," and then the poor fool fell to kissing the silken purse as if it had been a living thing and could feel and return his caresses.

"And she says—" he went on, "that she and Mrs. Hyde have filled the purse between them so that we may share and share alike. They have sent as much as they dared; they were afraid to excite suspicion by putting in too much."

I had already counted the money over and found that there were twenty Napoleons in my hand. Twenty Napoleons." I said—"Well, I haven't had a fairing for many a long year and I never thought to have another—Some day, I will pay that handsome old lady back again in one form if not in another, that is if she lives until I get out of this, which I must say she looks like doing."

Those twenty Napoleons made a vast difference to De Lancy. For myself I was strong and hardy. I was perfectly content

Parted

to go on as I had done for three years past.

But he had never got used to the food, and indeed ate so little that it was a wonder to me that he was able to keep body and soul together. If one had money, it was possible to purchase a few luxuries and, much against his inclination, I insisted on all the money being put by for him.

“You are piling up my debt to an unconscionable height, Hyde,” he said on the first day that we paid a visit to the canteen and I resolutely refused to touch a morsel of the sausage which we had bought.

“I’ll ask you to pay your debt in full some day,” I said quietly.

“And I’ll do it with all my heart,” he rejoined quickly.

I was not so sure of that, but it suited me best to say nothing. In truth, I don’t think just about this time that I hated him as virulently as I had done before. It was an effort to me at times to remember that he was in very truth my enemy, that he had stolen my sweetheart from me, that I had sworn sooner or later to have

Grip

his blood unless he should happen to have mine.

However, be that as it might, the instinct of preserving this man alive was very strong in me and was ever present in my mind, and I continued to save him and to shield him to the greatest extent that was in my power. I have often thought since those times, that without the twenty Napoleons which Margaret and Mrs. Hyde had sent us, De Lancy would never, never could, have got through the year which followed on the visit of the two ladies. I was the purse-keeper, and I spun the money out as far as I possibly could, making a rule of never spending more than a franc a day, and if our mess was fairly good, of not even spending as much as that.

And, after all, I need not have been so careful, for just at the end of the year—that is my fifth and rather more than De Lancy's third year of imprisonment—we received a notification late one evening to the effect that De Lancy was ordered to attend at the Commandant's bureau at ten o'clock the following morning, and that he

Parted

was not to go to work with the rest of our gang in the earlier part of the day. That meant that I also was to have a holiday, a circumstance to which I was by no means averse. The order, however, had been sufficient to throw De Lancy into a fever of curiosity and apprehension.

“Something has happened—what can it be?” he said at least twenty times as we lay on our bed of planks that night.

“Perhaps another lady seeking a relative,” I answered. “If so let us hope that she has come armed with a little fairing like the last one.”

“Hyde, you are a thorough Englishman,” he exclaimed, “as mercenary as you are high.”

“We have found those Napoleons very useful,” I suggested.

“*We!*” he repeated with scorn. “Yes, a great deal those Napoleons have done for you. Why, every one that we have spent has gone down my gullet in some form or other.”

“We won’t split straws about it,” I said, for there was no gainsaying the truth of his remark.

Grip

“ Still, I wonder—I wonder—Hyde, do you think that my wife——”

“ Comrade, I cannot think—I know nothing. Why not go to sleep and wait till morning to see what morning brings ? ”

I made this and similar suggestions a good many times, but I might as well have talked to the boards on which we lay, to the chain which bound us together or the lamp swinging over our heads. Sleep seemed to be miles away from him and, being of a highly nervous and excitable temperament, he made it keep miles away from my eyes also. And even when morning came and the rest of the *forçats* went off to their day’s work, we had some weary hours to get through before we were due to present ourselves at the Commandant’s bureau.

However, the hour at last drew near and we were escorted to the bureau by a *garde-chiourme*, not our friend Pierre Lebrun but another. Pierre being, as was usual with him at that hour, out in the stoneyard with our gang.

We had never been in the bureau since

Parted

the visit of Mrs. Hyde and the young lady called Ginevra, and I had almost to hold De Lancy up as we went along. I do not know what he expected—his wife—strange visitors—some plot to ruin him and lengthen his term of imprisonment—even the *guillotine* itself. I saw at a glance as we entered that no strangers were present. I felt also that we were in for no unpleasantness; somehow the experienced *forçat* learns to know the atmosphere of his *Bagne* and the countenances of the officials as an old mariner learns to know the set of the tides and the signs of the heavens.

The Commandant was sitting at his large table and he looked up as we entered and saluted him. He did not this time go through the pretence of asking our names, but addressed himself immediately to my comrade.

“Monsieur le Comte,” he said quietly, “his Majesty has been pleased to send me instructions for your immediate release, he having bestowed upon you his full and free pardon for the offences for which you were sent here. Your irons will be struck off

Grip

now, and when you have made your toilette, you will be free to go when it pleases you."

If I had not been blessed with a quick eye and a ready hand, De Lancy would have fallen to the ground, for he reeled and fell over against me. I caught him in a firm grasp and steadied him until the first great shock was over. The Commandant sat watching him not unkindly.

"Give him some of that water," he said to me, pointing to the bottle of water which, with a glass, stood on the table at his elbow.

After a gulp or two of the water, De Lancy pulled himself together again. "Your pardon, sir," he said, with a salute to the Commandant, "but may I ask to see my pardon?"

"Certainly—it is here," and the Commandant gave him a large official-looking document from which depended several seals.

De Lancy read it through and then handed it back again." I am very sensible of his Majesty's clemency," he said simply.

"Monsieur le Comte, I congratulate you

Parted

on your recovered freedom," said the Commandant with a wave of his hand. " You will now go and have your fetters removed. As for you," looking at me and holding the point of his middle finger against the centre of his forehead as if that would help him to fix my identity. " Your name is——"

" Charles Hyde, *mon Commandant*," I replied.

" Yes, ah, yes; and you are a commended *forçat*?"

" Yes, *mon Commandant*."

" Yes—an affair of a man who struck an officer?"

" Yes, *mon Commandant*."

" Good! Then how many years' service have you?"

" Five years."

" Your term?"

" Fifteen years."

" Your crime?"

" I killed a *gens de police* in a scrimmage, *mon Commandant*; he arrested me for another."

" Ah, yes—I remember. Well—" turning to our warden—" direct that this man,

Grip

Charles Hyde, be put on the half chain, and also that he be passed into the *salles d'épreuve*."

As I have said before, if I had learned nothing else during my sojourn in the *Bagne*, I had certainly acquired perfect control over myself. If De Lancy had received any sudden news such as being given a change of life which would have alleviated at least half of his woes, he would have staggered and shown signs of the most tempestuous emotion. On my part I was able to bow profoundly and to express my thanks in plain and unemotional language.

"You have fairly earned it," said the Commandant. He dismissed us then and we followed our escort back across the great square in order that De Lancy might have his chain taken off.

"Hyde," he said, "I have my wife to thank for this. There has been a change of dynasty, and Louis Philippe sits on the throne now. Margaret has gone to him at once and worked on him till she got me out of this."

Parted

“How do you know there has been a change?”

“The pardon is made out in the name of his Majesty Louis Philippe,” he answered. “Hyde, you know what I shall do when I get out?”

“Seek your wife.”

“My wife,” he said, smiling, “will be at yonder gate to receive me.”

His faith in her was divine!

“No, my first and last thought till we meet again will be to work night and day for your pardon. I will not leave a stone unturned—you shall never be out of my thoughts. Not that anything I could ever do even in fifty years could repay what you have done for me here, or what you have been to me. And now, my friend and comrade, our time together is very short. Where will you meet me when you are free? Will you come straight to the Château St. Etienne?”

“Not to your house. No, anywhere but there,” I said hurriedly.

“I quite understand! I felt that way too. Hyde, I have never told you all these

Grip

weary, weary years, because the very words would have seared my tongue as with a hot iron, but now that all is at an end, and I am a free man again, it does not matter so much. But on our way here, they brought us through my own town—St. Etienne. Yes, I, the Suzerain of the place, was marched through one of a gang of *forçats*—*Mon Dieu*, through the ranks of my own people.”

“And your people?”

“They knelt to see me pass, praying and weeping for me! Now, I go back among them. But you—it is possible that I may not know the day of your release. I don’t want to see Toulon again. Will you then write to me at the Château St. Etienne, Ardèche, and meet me that day month at the Hotel du Soleil d’Or at Arles!”

“At the Hotel du Soleil d’Or, at Arles,” I repeated, “I will be there.”

Out of Sight

CHAPTER XVI.

OUT OF SIGHT.

I PARTED from De Lancy on the assurance that I would meet him one month from the day of my leaving the *Bagne* at the Hotel du Soleil d'Or at Arles. When he was fairly gone and I realized that I was as half a man, for the effect of the half-chain was most extraordinary for a few days, that I had parted from him who had been my friend and enemy in one, I knew that I ought not to have let him go out in complete ignorance of our real relations! And yet, it had seemed impossible to tell him just at that moment.

Besides, there was Margaret to think of, for if Margaret knew that I was a prisoner at the *Bagne* of Toulon, she would most certainly write home at once and give in-

Grip

formation of my whereabouts to my family. That, for many reasons, and chiefly that my father might be spared the pain and annoyance which such knowledge would give him, I was most anxious to avoid, so I consoled myself with the thought that, after all, I had done what was for the best under the circumstances.

And to say besides yet once more—I must confess that I had never liked De Lancy so well or felt my hatred so faltering as I did on the morning when I watched his fetters being taken off and then saw him walk away, his eyes swimming in tears and he ever turning back to wave his adieu to me. If I had spoken then, I think that the words would have choked me.

How much I missed De Lancy I am sure no words could express. I had missed the boy, Jean Leroy, but his death was in a great measure a comfort and a relief to me. After De Lancy's departure, I know now that if I had been given another chain-companion I should most likely have foregone all idea of revenge, have run amuck and probably ended my days under the *guillo-*

Out of Sight

tine. As it was, the relief of being only on the half-chain, which scarcely incommoded my movements at all, and also of being passed into the *salles d'épreuve*, where I had not only more liberty, but also a choice of work, was exceedingly great and it had come at a time when I most needed distraction.

Still I was in prison. I was safe and sound in the *Bagne* of Toulon, and I had ten years yet to serve ere I should be free. And let me tell you, ten years can sometimes seem a much longer time than fifteen. On the day of my sentence, fifteen years had seemed like a lifetime; when De Lancy was set at liberty, and I thought over the years which would probably have to go by ere I should see him again, ten years was like an eternity.

But this phase of mind did not last very long with me. After a few hours of depression I pulled myself together, remembering that I had not been called "the Bulldog" for nothing, that I had determinedly set myself to get through this particular purgatory and to attain a certain object.

Grip

Now that I had won through the most bitter and difficult part of all, I would not turn back. I was no craven.

So I set myself to patiently await the coming of a letter from De Lancy, the first letter I should have received for more than five years. But it did not come—it never came! I had no word, no sign from him whom I had saved and shielded for three years, whom I had worked for, toiled for, almost lived for, for whom I had denied myself food, rest and many a trifling advantage which I have not thought it worth while to detail in this story.

Still, I waited patiently until three and then six months had gone by, but not a word or a sign came to me from the outside world. I did not dare to write to De Lancy for the handwriting would have betrayed me to Margaret, and I did not choose to ask one of the scribes in the *Bagne* to write for me. So I waited and waited, but nothing came and six months went by, then nine months, then a year slipped past and I began to realize that De Lancy had forgotten me.

I think if he had remembered the past

Out of Sight

sufficiently well to write to me as often as I might receive a letter, that I should have let the old hatred of the past six years sink into oblivion. As it was, I made no fresh friendships now that I was entirely on my own responsibility, and the utter and intense loneliness of my life was almost insupportable.

During all my leisure hours, and they were somewhat more frequent now that I had worked my way through the *garde fatigue*, my thoughts ran chiefly upon De Lancy's life with Margaret, *my* Margaret. I pictured to myself the meeting between the two, the eager questions which Margaret had asked of his life in the *Bagne*, of the privations he had suffered, the hardships he had undergone, the humiliations he had endured; I pictured how she had asked him of his friendships, and especially of the Charles Hyde who had been his chain-comrade, and I could almost hear De Lancy saying in his fascinatingly well-bred way that he must contrive to do something to serve him.

And it had stopped there! It had gone no

Grip

further! Ease, and wealth, and luxury, and the companionship of the wife he idolized had completely blotted out the friendship of his days of wretchedness. I realized the truth at last, and the bitterness of the draught was far more bitter than any cup which had ever before been held to my lips! And mingled with my bitterness was a feeling of intense and, alas, unavailable regret that I had had this man in my power and I had let him go! Why, why, had I been such a fool? Why, for the sake of a nicety of honor which he would have been quite incapable of appreciating, had he known it, had I preserved and sheltered this man so as to let him go scot-free back to the joy of the happiness which he had stolen from me? Fool that I was, regrets were useless now that the bird had flown from the cage.

I have said that when De Lancy had passed out of the *Bagne*, my old enmity was almost dead. Ah, yes, but "almost" is a word of uncertain quality. As folk say, "While there is life there is hope;" so while there is a faint vestige of an old hatred left, there is always a chance of its

Out of Sight

springing into new life and flourishing more vigorously than ever. So with mine. In the loneliness and desolation of my almost hopeless life, with hot-headed ruin behind me and an eternity of dreariness, as it seemed, in front of me, my hatred which had almost faded away of inanition aforetime, took on new life as it were and throve and throve apace until it possessed me far more fiercely and uncontrollably than ever it had done before.

How I hated him ! How bitter, how many were my unavailing regrets that I had not let him come to grief as I might often have done. I had saved his life over and over again. Twice I had pulled him with a mighty jerk from under a great block of stone, which, had I not saved him so, would have crushed him to a shapeless mass. At least a dozen times I had talked him into quiet endurance and had so saved him the *bastonnade*, and even the *guillotine* itself. And once I had, by a great effort, prevented a falling log from lighting upon him by receiving the main part of the weight upon my own shoulder. That had

Grip

cost me a week of sleepless nights and days of absolute torture. And it all counted for nothing with him now ! Bah ! the ingrate !

But I had not been nicknamed "the Bulldog" for nothing, and after the first smart of the new pain had passed off, I entertained no notion of letting my anger and my disgust get the better of me and unfit me to work my way through. No, no, I held myself more carefully in check than ever. I lived entirely so as to fit myself against the time when I should be free. I never spent one penny of the money of which I was possessed, some of it being part of the little hoard which I had disbursed so carefully on my comrade's behalf, and some of my own small earnings in my leisure hours, when we were allowed to work for our own benefit. I had always been what we used to call at home in Yorkshire a "dab" at whittling things with a knife and my old accomplishment stood me in good stead then, for it enabled me to make quite a little store of toys for disposal in the bazaar of the *Bagne*, and every farthing that I made I carefully hoarded, in order that I

Out of Sight

might have enough money to carry me straight to Paris, there to fit myself out as a gentleman once more, to remove as far as was possible any traces of the *forçat* which might have stamped themselves more or less indelibly upon me, and most important of all, to put myself once more under M. Brisso and to take a daily lesson in his fencing-school.

In this way two more years went by. It was then eight years since I had been sent to the *Bagne*, and just three years since De Lancy and I had parted. I had got over the half-way house and every day that went by would bring me nearer and nearer to freedom and a new life.

But I was not, thanks to the Almighty, destined to work out the rest of my term. I was sent for one morning to the Commandant's bureau and went thither in charge of a *garde-chiourme*. The Commandant was not there when we arrived and we waited some twenty minutes or so until he came. I heard my escort discussing him in an undertone with the two men on duty at the door of the bureau!

Grip

“ H’m—it’s always the same now—wait—wait—wait. It is a different thing to the old Commandant who was the soul of punctuality. This fellow will order you to be at a certain place at a certain hour, come half an hour late and blame you for wasting the time of the *forçats*. *Ciel*, there is no being even with him.”

“ Yes, it was a bad day for the *Bagne* when the old Commandant was pensioned off. They say he was considered too easy with his *forçats*, poor devils.”

“ I’ve heard that too ! Ah, well, well, it’s no use sighing for the days that can never come back again. Ah, here he is,” and he drew himself up to the salute, as the Commandant turned in at the door.

It was the first time that I had been brought into personal contact with the new Commandant, although the old one had been gone for more than two years, aye, more nearly three, if my memory serves me. He was tall and black and scowling, with a great deal of swagger about him, such as is often put down to the military man and which you seldom or never see in the sol-

Out of Sight

dier! He looked at me sharply and asked the *garde-chiourme* why I was there?

“This man—Sharl 'Yde, *mon Commandant*; you sent for him,” was the man’s reply.

“Ah, yes, yes; bring him in.”

We followed him into the bureau and he sat down in the same big arm-chair as the other Commandant had done on my last visit there.

After a moment’s silence he looked up at me and said sharply—“Your name?”

“Charles Hyde, *mon Commandant*.”

“English?”

“Yes, *mon Commandant*.”

“Your term here.”

“Fifteen years, *mon Commandant*.”

“You have served—?”

“Eight.”

“This man’s record?” said he, turning to the clerk who sat at the end of the table.

The clerk consulted a big book in silence for a minute or two; the Commandant meanwhile tapped restlessly on the table with his finger-tips.

Grip

“Charles 'Yde—English—age thirty-four—term fifteen years, unblemished record—highly commended during second year of term for preventing his fellow-prisoner, a noted bad character from escaping. That is all, monsieur.”

“H’m! Well—I have news for you. His Majesty has been pleased to pardon you.”

“Sir!” I exclaimed.

“You are free as soon as your chain can be taken off. Take care that you don’t find yourself sent here again.”

He dismissed me with a wave of his hand and the *garde-chiourme* twitched at my arm that I should go out. I bowed for the last time to the Commandant, but he did not look at me so I stumbled out into the blinding sunshine.

“You are not very keen on getting away, hey?” was the remark of my escort. “*Mon Dieu*, if I were a fine fellow like you, I would make all the haste I could lest the Commandant finds out that he has mistaken you for another.”

A Tryst

CHAPTER XVII.

A TRYST.

I WAS not very long in getting out of the *Bagne* when once my anklet was off and I was free of the chain which I had worn for eight years. I made no adieux, but as soon as I was outside the gates I went in search of a respectable inn and there I asked for a room and a tub of hot water. How I enjoyed my bath none but myself will ever know. It was a big tub, given to me in a great wash-house and probably only used for the washing of linen. They filled it almost to the brim, and I got into it, and with a good scrubbing-brush and a huge lump of soap, I washed years of dirt away.

I had bought linen already, enough change for a week, and when I had fully exhausted the luxury of the great tub, I groomed myself well down and arrayed

Grip

myself in my fresh and dainty shirt, which gave me a sense of great pleasure. My clothes were stamped with a look of the *Bagne*, so I went off to the shop of a second-hand dealer, where, after a good deal of trouble, I succeeded in finding a suit of fine brown clothes that fitted me as if they had been made for me.

Then I went back to the inn and dined, dined sumptuously off a great beef-steak and several vegetables, followed by an omelette, which somehow reminded me of a Yorkshire pudding at its best. And, after a stroll round the town, I went to bed!

All the day I had been looking forward to my first night in bed, but, as a matter of fact, I could not sleep a wink. I felt choked and smothered, and, at last, I put a blanket on the floor and laid on that, with the hard bolster under my head. I have never got used to a soft pillow since!

Even then I did not sleep half as well as I had done on my bed of planks over in the *Bagne*, and I determined, as my bed was a matter of so little moment to me, I would push on to Paris as fast as I possibly could.

A Tryst

The diligence started at four o'clock in the morning and I was so lucky as to secure a seat beside the driver. I contrived before we started to write the promised letter to De Lancy. Of course there would have been no difficulty in doing that had not I always the fear before me of betraying myself to Margaret before the time came. However, by dint of holding my pen as I had never held it before, I contrived so to disguise my handwriting that I should not have known it myself; and this was what I wrote: "I left the *Bagne* this morning. I will be, as agreed, at the Hotel du Soleil d'Or, Arles, this day month—the 25th of September. Charles Hyde!"

I threw the pen down and, as I dusted the contents of the sand-pot over the words that I had written, I told myself that it was probably for the last time that I should sign myself by the name which had been as a merciful cloak to my own identity. I hoped so with all my heart.

I breathed freely as the diligence started off and Toulon was soon left far behind us. I only looked back once, as a man might

Grip

look back who had escaped the tortures of hell. And from that moment I set myself to enjoy every moment of my time. Nothing escaped my notice ; every tree, hedge, bird, beast, and cloud that came within my ken had each and all a story to tell,—a story of which we should regard as the greatest boon of all, though we do not always prize it as we should do, a story of *liberty*. As we went we passed several weary-looking wretches tramping along towards Paris. They were tired and footsore, but I did not pity them. *They were free!* Probably they had but just come out of the *Bagne*, and, if that were so, they were too happy in their freedom to mind the minor miseries of being on the tramp under God's sweet-smelling sky ; in having the light of moon and stars instead of the ghastly lamp swinging overhead to which they had been used ; in having all the sweet sounds and scents of the blessed open country in place of the foul air with which the *Bagne* reeked. No, no, I flung each of such a franc or two to help him on his way, but of pity I had none. I was too full myself of

A Tryst

the unspeakable joy and blessing of freedom.

At last we got to Paris. By that time I had become almost used to sleeping in a bed and I sought out a modest hotel where I could bestow myself with comfort and economy, for I had yet to make sure that, after a lapse of eight years, my draft on the bank wherein I had lodged my little fortune, would be honored.

However, as soon as I showed myself in the bank I saw that I was recognized by those who had known me before. I saw the head of the firm and in confidence I briefly explained my reasons for not having communicated with him before. I found of course, that my money had grown a little by reason of having lain idle so long, and I drew a cheque for fifty pounds and went off in search of a tailor forthwith.

From him I ordered several suits of clothes and I also purchased other necessities such as were in fashion. I let my red locks grow to a more ordinary length than had been the mode in the *Bagne* and I was at no little pains to try to remove as far

Grip

as possible the traces of my long spell of a rough life; indeed after a couple of days my dressing-table was as littered with various washes and scents and soaps as if I had been a pretty young lady just introduced into the gay world instead of being, as I was, a great hulking fellow lately released from the *Bagne* of Toulon.

During the whole of my eight years of prison-life, I had never once seen myself, so that I do not actually know what I looked like then. But I do know that after I had been a week in Paris and had got myself into a suit of clothes for which I had been measured and fitted, when I had been washed and scrubbed and groomed until I was as clean and smart as a new pin, I presented as personable an appearance as any man could wish for. I was no beauty—I had never, as old William, the head-keeper, had bluntly put it, had any beauty to answer for—but I was something to look at, all the same. There was only one point which really troubled me—it was that my hands were so rough and coarse, though nothing to what they had been in the early

A Tryst

days of my time at Toulon. However, that was but a small matter. I bought gloves of a size or two larger than I had been used to wear and troubled myself no more excepting that I bestowed a good deal of toilet care upon them.

And every moment that I could spare I spent in M. Brisso's fencing-school, for I had naturally got not a little rusty in the art and needed all that I could learn in the little time that was at my disposal, so as to fit myself for the encounter which lay before me.

Still I worked with a will ; my whole heart and soul was set on the one object, and it was wonderful how quickly I picked up all that I had known before and a good deal that I had never known. And so, by the time I was obliged to set out from Paris so as to keep my appointment with De Lancy at Arles, I was, so M. Brisso declared, the prettiest fencer he had had in his school for years.

It is a far cry from Paris to Arles, but I enjoyed my journey there very thoroughly. The weather was settled and very fine, the

Grip

coach ran well, the horses were good and the driver knew his business. And at last I was within measurable distance of the hour for which I had lived for nearly nine years, for which I had waded through the waters of desolation, for which I had eaten of the bread of bitterness and endured a life which was little if any better than hell itself. Of course, there was just a chance that De Lancy would not keep the tryst. He had faithfully promised to do so, but how was I to be sure that he would not prove like the Baal of the priests to have gone on a journey, or to be asleep? Of course I knew that he would have no inkling of the real nature of my errand, but I did think it more than possible that he might not feel inclined to put himself to trouble and inconvenience in order to keep the tryst, that all the fine promises of his days of obligation might prove to be as so much piecrust, made to be broken, that he might be so wrapped up in his happiness with Margaret, that he would not care to take a journey only to meet the friend of his time of desolation.

A Tryst

However, only time would show whether he would be there or not. I was on my way thither and every beat of the good horses' feet took me nearer and nearer to the place where we were to meet; every slant of the sun's rays saw me nearer and nearer to the desire which had possessed me for nine years. I had almost forgotten that I had ever been a *forçat*, the years I had spent in the *Bagne* had already slipped far away into the consoling distance of the past, and I seemed to have crammed years of pleasure and life into the month which had just gone by.

At last we drew near to Arles, and drove in through the quaint and quiet streets. I took note of the beautiful women standing in their doorways and wondered whether they had found their inheritance of loneliness a blessing or a curse? I wondered whether any of them had played fast and loose with men's best and holiest feelings, whether they had used men's hearts as a toy and a plaything, as a ball to be tossed hither and thither, and likely enough to be in the end tossed clean out of sight, to be

Grip

in some waste place uncared for, unthought of, neglected and forlorn? Then we turned into the great court-yard of the Hotel du Soleil d'Or and my thoughts were directed into an altogether different channel.

I eagerly scanned the faces of the little crowd of people who had assembled to watch the arrival of the coach, but that of De Lancy was not among them! Still, I was beforehand with my tryst, and two days must elapse ere the full time would be up. I walked into the hotel and asked whether they had any news of the Comte de Lancy's arrival?

The handsome landlady told me that Monsieur le Comte had commanded rooms, she believed, for the following day; but he had certainly not yet arrived.

I thanked her and went my way. So he meant to come after all! Well, I was glad of that. I was only one step now from my revenge!

I did not remain at the Soleil d'Or myself. Not for worlds would I have remained under the same roof as De Lancy. I therefore went to the other of the two

A Tryst

principal inns of the little place and there obtained a good enough lodging for all my purposes.

I found the time hang exceedingly heavy upon my hands. I knew not a soul, I had not learned to read French, so that even the week-old newspaper of the district was a closed book to me, there was nothing to see in the place excepting the beautiful women, and they were not for me or my heart for them. It seemed to me as if the night would never come. And when night did come at last I found myself choking among such a heap of down that I had to have recourse to my old expedient of turning out and lying on the floor. There the mosquitoes found me out and at last I got up, and in the first blush of the early dawn I sallied out and walked off to the Rhone, into whose waters I plunged very gratefully.

On my return I broke my fast with a roll and coffee, and put on the time somehow till the hour came round for the coach to arrive.

But De Lancy did not come by it; evi-

Grip

dently he was not as eager for our tryst as I was ; he did not mean to arrive until the next day.

I was still standing watching the horses being taken out, when the handsome land-lady of the hotel came out into the court-yard and addressed herself to me.

“ Monsieur was inquiring yesterday for Monsieur le Comte de Lancy,” she began, in a voice which was that of a person plainly impressed by the station of my supposed friend.

I admitted that such was the truth, and she continued, “ Monsieur le Comte has arrived in his own carriage, with post-horses. If Monsieur will give himself the pain to enter, I will inform Monsieur le Comte that Monsieur inquires for him.”

I followed her into a room on the right of the door feeling that the supreme moment had come. There was a window looking into the court-yard, where the coach was still standing, and another at the opposite side of the room looking into a garden. I strode across to it, my heart beating hard and fast, my senses almost reeling

A Tryst

and—and—as I stood there half hidden by the white curtains, I saw Margaret Eden, *my* Margaret, wearing a white gown—unchanged excepting that she had ripened and grown in beauty—come across the grass-plot straight towards me!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GIRL IN THE GARDEN.

AS I stood at the window half hidden by the snowy curtains, such a wave of tempestuous feeling overcame me that I was within an ace of breaking down into tears like a weak woman. As I watched Margaret coming slowly across the grass, I knew in an instant that I had been utterly and entirely wrong in thinking that my love for my early sweetheart had died out and almost given place to a feeling of hatred. Hatred—for *her*—my God! Hatred! Why, at the very first sight of her, I knew that I loved every hair of her head, that I worshipped the very ground on which she walked, and, most positive proof of all, an overwhelming conviction came to me that for her sake,

The Girl in The Garden

De Lancy was safe, if she loved him, I would go out into darkness forever rather than touch a hair of his head.

I watched her pass on out of sight and then I heard a hurrying footstep on the polished floor outside, and then Margaret's own voice saying—"Where is he? In here?" and the next moment a lady came running in.

"Oh! Mr. Hyde—what words can I ever find—why—why—*George!*" she ended with a gasp.

I saw De Lancy behind her, his face shining and radiant with happiness, but the Margaret who had taken hold of both my hands was a new Margaret, a stout, buxom, rotund Margaret whom I had never seen before, a Margaret whom I did not know, in whom I could see but few traces of the sweetheart of long ago, and who then was the girl in the garden, the girl whom I had taken for Margaret?

"Margaret!" I exclaimed, and my tone must have sounded incredulous, for she laughed aloud.

"Why do you say 'Margaret' in that

Grip

tone?" she demanded. "Have I grown so utterly out of recognition?"

She had, but I could not well say so, and moreover, at that moment De Lancy, who had been staring in a perplexed way first at one and then at the other of us, contrived to put a word in edgeways, as the saying goes.

"What do you mean by 'recognition,' Margaret?" he exclaimed. "And why did you call him 'George?' His name is Charles."

"Nay," said she very gently, taking her husband's hand while she still kept tight hold of one of mine—"you do not understand, dearest. Your friend Charles Hyde, if this be he, is my old friend and sweetheart, George Somers of Somersley, whom we have all thought dead this many a year."

"George Somers—a Somers of Somersley!" he ejaculated in a tone of the most profound astonishment, "and you knew me all along?"

"I am afraid that I did," I admitted.

He had got hold of my other hand by this time and was shaking it as if he could think

The Girl in The Garden

of no other way of expressing himself—“My friend—my best friend—” he broke out at last—“ I—I can find no words now that we meet at last. I have gone over those years of ours together a hundred—no—no—a thousand times. Your silence—”

“ My silence ! ” I exclaimed. “ But you never wrote.”

“ What, you never had a letter from me ? ”

“ Never one ! ”

“ Then they kept back my letters, for I wrote—and wrote—and wrote. As I told you when we parted, I worked day and night for you. You have never been a day or an hour out of my thoughts. I never rested till I obtained your pardon—and this last month has been insupportable.”

“ What ! It was you who got my pardon ? ” I cried.

“ Do you think that pardons drop from the skies, my friend ? ” he said simply.

I think that even without that glimpse of the girl in the garden, my old hatred could never have held out against the overflow-

Grip

ing eagerness of the pair who had come to meet me. Every black drop seemed to be oozing away out of my heart and I saw Margaret De Lancy for the first time in her true character; up to that moment she had never been other than Margaret Eden to me.

“Do you think that pardons drop from the skies, my friend?” he said simply at which I released my hand from Margaret’s close clasp and took his in both of mine. So we met again, my enemy and I, the man whose blood I had sworn to have, the man whom I had sheltered and shielded, and hated and, as I now knew, loved even while I thought that I hated him.

Then for the first time, I realized that it really was the same Margaret as in the old days, for she put out her two hands to me and said just in the old tone, “Dear old George, I have so often wondered why Desmond’s comrade should have been so good to him, have worked and slaved for him, have spared him and sheltered him, and saved his life over and over again? I might have

The Girl in The Garden

known—I ought to have known who Charles Hyde was all the time. And to think that you were doing all this for me and I—I——”

“ Pray don’t say another word about it,” I said, looking down at her, and, if the truth be told, wondering whether it was happiness or sorrow which had changed her so completely from the sweetheart of my boyish days? It seemed then as if it was centuries ago since I had had any love for Margaret Eden—so much may we change in a few minutes of actuality.

“ Dear old George,” she said, in just the old half coy tone of shy affection.

I think if I had not been so huge and she so far below me in height, that she would have kissed me in her overflowing gratitude and excitement. And I am sure that De Lancy would not have minded, even had he known everything in the past, even if he could have looked into my heart and seen the barren years that had been laid waste by my love for this woman. But I never once thought of bending my cheek to receive the caress which would have been the highest honor she would have known how

Grip

to bestow upon me. . . . I had given my heart away and I have ever been honest and heart-whole, if nothing else in my dealings with women.

“Tell me—” I said, when at last we were all sitting close together—“who—I thought I saw you in the garden just now, Margaret! A young lady in a white gown, with curls over her shoulders.”

“Ah—why, don’t you know? Do you think her so like me, George?” she cried.

“I thought it was you.”

“It was Constance. You remember Constance? She is spending a few months with us.”

“*Constance*! Little yellow-haired Constance!” I exclaimed.

“Ah, yes: she is so excited about you. She would come with us, and she does not know that you have actually arrived. Desmond, do go and fetch her, dearest. How cruel of us to forget her.”

De Lancy got up at once and went to fetch his sister-in-law; and then Margaret turned round to me and said—“Dear old George—I have not said a thousandth

The Girl in The Garden

part of what I meant to say and want to say. . . . but God bless you, dear, for all the past. I've made you a bad return."

"No—no—not a word of that, please," I said entreatingly.

"Dear old George," she said, dashing away her tears with one hand while she held the other one towards me.

I took it and kissed it. I never felt so near to being a hypocrite in my life.

De Lancy came back then, bringing his sister-in-law with him. "Have you told her?" I heard Margaret say, and he quickly replied, "Not a word!"

"Constance," said Madame De Lancy, "this is Desmond's friend and comrade, Charles Hyde."

I bowed profoundly, and she looked at me with a puzzled air as she held out her hand. "I am sure," she said with a very gracious and winning air, "that we can never all of us say or do enough to thank you for all you have been to Desmond and done for him; but we will try, Mr. Hyde, indeed we will."

"You have thanked me sufficiently

Grip

already," I said, trying not to show the overpowering emotion which almost possessed me.

She started at the sound of my voice and looked aside at her sister. "Margaret," she said, "surely, that is a Somers voice. Is it—it is—yes, it's George Somers, George Somers himself all the time! But why were you called Charles Hyde? And why did you not give Desmond a hint of the truth? We thought it so strange that a mere friend should be so good, but there is nothing wonderful in a Somers standing by an Eden. And only think, Margaret, how delighted dear old Aunt Eliza will be! She has almost broken her heart over you."

CHAPTER XIX.

CONSTANCE.

I ALMOST forgot how long we talked that day and what was said. But I do remember that Margaret turned to me with the first cloud which, as yet, had darkened her face and said, "Oh, George, I am afraid I have bad news for you. Your dear old father...."

"Not gone?" I asked quickly.

She put out her hand and the tears came into her eyes; I needed no other answer.

"Well," I said, after a moment's silence, "I am glad that he never knew. If he knows now, he understands everything."

"Everything," she said softly.

I meant more by the word than she did, and I felt that if my dear old dad was cognizant of all that had passed in my heart that day, he must be happy indeed to think that such a load of evil thoughts

Grip

had slipped away from me into oblivion forever.

“George, dear,” she continued, “I’m afraid that is not quite all.”

My heart went out to our little Benjamin at once. “Not Wynne,” I exclaimed.

“No, not Wynne, but Robert.”

“Bob! Not dead?” I called out incredulously.

She looked at me. “He was killed in the hunting-field last year. And Wynne has since then persistently refused to use the title unless he had sure evidence of your death.”

“My death! The title, . . . do you mean. . . .?”

“That you are Sir George Somers of Somersley,” she said very gently.

I took the news quietly. There was nothing to rejoice over and, in truth, I would infinitely rather have continued to be plain George Somers, the “Mr. Garge” of my younger days, than have become the head of the family by my brother’s death.

“We must let Wynne know,” said Margaret presently.

Constance

“I must go home at once. I must see them all, all that are left,” I declared.

“No—no—we will send for Wynne. Dear boy, he will be so rejoiced and he will love to come to St. Etienne for a few weeks. Then you can go home together. Remember you are promised to us for the present and I can consent to nothing else.”

“If it were only Wynne,” I made reply, “I would gladly fall in with your wishes. But I have my aunt to think of. She is an old lady; I could not expect her to make such a journey at her time of day, particularly when I am a great hulking fellow in the best of health, who is perfectly well able to go and seek her.”

“But your visit to St. Etienne,” cried Margaret blankly.

“Dear Margaret, it will only be put off. I will inflict myself on you later on. Let me propose a plan. Do you know where Wynne is just now?”

“Wynne is at home. I had a letter from my mother this morning,” put in Constance Eden. “Your Aunt Eliza too, she is at

Grip

Somersley. She has been a good deal there since Wynne was left alone."

"Then let us all go back to dear Yorkshire," I said, "and you shall all be my guests at Somersley. So long as you two are together, I don't suppose it matters whether you are in France or England. You must see, Margaret, my dear, that I must get home to see Aunt Eliza and Wynne without delay. Don't let me go back alone."

It was as I had said, it mattered little or nothing to Margaret de Lancy where they were so long as they were together, and so long as we were all together, they both seemed to be content. As for me, I can hardly tell you what my feelings were at this time. I looked back in astonishment and wonder over the days when I had honestly believed myself to be in love with Margaret, and in still greater bewilderment to the years when I had genuinely believed myself to be Margaret de Lancy's bitterest and most implacable enemy. It seemed now as if all those evil thoughts had found a home in my heart for no other purpose

Constance

than to save me to woo an Eden bride—for I knew by that time that my old affair with Margaret had been but a forecasting of my unquenchable love and adoration for her sister. I had mistaken the boy's for the man's love, just as one might mistake paste for a diamond. But what man or woman ever mistakes a diamond for paste I should like to know ?

Out of deference to my impatience to see my home and my own people again, the De Lancys made no objections to starting for England at once. We set out indeed the very next day, Constance Eden going with us. And in due course of time we all arrived at Somersley, the dear home, which I had often thought never to see again. It was both sweet and bitter, that home-going. Sweet to be there among the true Yorkshire hearts, in the sound of the mellow Yorkshire voices, in sight of the blue wolds and in daily touch with the great, strong, healthy, well-living, manly people ; bitter to hear myself daily addressed by the title which ever reminded me of those who had gone before me ; bitter to think that I should

Grip

never see them again, that they had passed away all unknowing of the truth.

My dear lad, Wynne, was so delighted to see me, he would scarce leave me and for days kept putting his hand on mine as if to make sure that I was a real presence and not a mere dream-thing, who might vanish and leave him wide-awake to the reality of chill disappointment. My dear little Benjamin.

As for Aunt Eliza, she was the same doughty, erect, bluff and worldly woman with a heart of gold as she had ever been. Her reception of me was thoroughly characteristic of herself.

“My dear boy,” she said, exactly as if I had been away for a week or so, “it is delightful to see you back again. I am a good deal older than I was and you I daresay are wiser. Come to my room and tell me all about it.”

I did go and I told her everything from beginning to end, or if not quite to the end, I confided everything down to the time of my seeing Margaret de Lancy again. Then, too, I told her all about Mrs. Hyde and her

Constance

niece Ginevra, and Aunt Eliza poked a little sly fun at me on the score of that most innocent young lady, such as would, I am sure, have been very greatly to her astonishment.

About this time I wrote to Mrs. Hyde and explained myself. I told her how she might, by applying to Jules Ferrand, get definite news of her son, and in reply, I received a letter saying that she and her niece were on the point of starting for Paris, in order to follow up my clue to the furthestmost end. A few weeks later she wrote to me from the gay city, telling me that she had proved beyond all shadow of doubt both the time and place of her son's death. She sent me her best thanks, and told me that she perfectly understood my reasons for not having spoken out at the time of her visit to the *Bagne*. She spoke of the relief of knowing the truth and begging me, when I found myself at leisure, to go down to Gloucestershire and pay her a visit.

"You will go?" said Aunt Eliza, when I showed her the letter.

"By and by, perhaps," I replied.

Grip

She looked at me sharply. "Is this girl pretty?"

"What girl?"

"This Ginevra! I don't know her other name."

"Miss Osmond. No, I don't think so. Not particularly pretty anyway," I replied. "I should not go to see her in any case."

"Oh! Ah, well, I thought you might be.—You've quite got over the other affair?"

"My dear aunt," I said smiling.

My thoughts went flying helter-skelter to Thorpe-Hutton where *she* was. The De Lancys with their children were, of course, my guests at Somersley; but, after breaking her journey for a single night, Constance Eden had gone home to Thorpe-Hutton, so that I only saw her from time to time. Yet every time that we met served but to deepen my love, to forge the chain which bound my heart yet a little more closely to hers.

It happened one day that Margaret, who was suffering from a severe nervous headache, asked me if I would send over to her

Constance

father's house for something which she required. "Desmond would go," she said, "but he hates to leave me if I am ill."

"I'll ride over," I said promptly.

"No—no—I cannot—"

"I was going to Thorpe-Hutton to-day in any case," I said, telling a lie without the very smallest compunction. "So give me a note to your mother and I will undertake to deliver it safely."

But I did not, however, find Mrs. Eden at home. The servant who answered my summons at the door told me that he believed she would not be back till close on dinner-time, but added that he was not sure whether Miss Eden was in the grounds or not. "But I know, Sir George," he added, "that she did not go with the mistress."

I said at once that I would go into the grounds and see if I could not find her, and that failing to do so, I would return to the house. I turned back from the great entrance and passed into the gardens, to that part where I had an idea she might be found. And my instinct proved to be

Grip

right, for I came upon her in a shady arbor where, sheltered from the mild October breezes, she was busily engaged in stitching at a bit of delicate embroidery.

I went in and joined her, and having given over Margaret's letter, I, from some impulse, gave her also the letter which I had received several days previously from Mrs. Hyde.

"So," I said, "the poor lady is satisfied at last. I wish I could have been the means of helping her to a more satisfactory end, but perhaps, as she says, the certainty is better to bear than suspense."

"Oh, yes; for her heart must have told her the truth long ago," Constance said pitifully. "She must have known that there was no hope any longer."

"You think so?"

"Oh, yes. I am sure of it."

She read the letter to the end and gave it back to me.

"There is one thing that I have never understood," she said, at last breaking the silence which had fallen upon us—"that is, why did you never confide your secret to

Constance

Desmond? It would have been quite safe with him."

She looked at me with lovely limpid eyes which seemed to set my heart on fire. I hesitated for a moment, got up and strode to the door of the arbor, then back again to her side. "Shall I tell you everything?" I asked, speaking in a hurry.

"I would like to know," she answered simply.

Then I told her all! I kept back nothing, I laid bare my very soul from the day on which I went blustering to the Colonel of the Regent's with the request for leave "because they were going to sell my sweetheart to a beast of a Frenchman," right down to the time when I reached the Hotel du Soleil d'Or at Arles.

She looked at me wonderingly. "And what happened to change you so?" she asked. "What made you give up your quest after so many years?"

I hesitated. I did not dare to tell her that it was because I had seen her from the window; because I had taken her for Margaret and had fallen more violently in

Grip

love with her than I had ever been in all my life before ; that after once seeing her—though I believed her at the moment to be Margaret—I had given up all idea of revenge, I had abandoned my hideous quest ; that love had softened where hate had hardened.

True, I was Sir George Somers of Somersley, I was in the very prime of life, I was rich, unfettered, well-born, and only a few, who would safely keep my secret, knew where and how I had spent the past eight years.

Still I dared not speak. There was a cloud, there was a ban, there was a secret, and it was one of shame ; my hands were stained with blood, though not blood shed maliciously. Knowing all this, I did not dare to speak, for to speak would be to aspire to her hand—and who was I, a jail-bird, that I should look at her ?

“ You don’t hate Desmond now,” she said.

“ Oh, no ; on the contrary, he is my best friend.”

“ But you did—till you met at Arles,”

Constance

she persisted. "What was it that changed you so?"

"I cannot tell you," I stammered.

"No?" she said gently. "Well—I am glad you don't hate him now. He is a dear fellow though—though I confess that I have never quite understood Margaret's adoration of him."

She dropped her voice almost to a whisper and she dropped her head over her embroidery, until her face was hidden from view. Something in the tone of her voice made me turn and look at her.

"Constance," I said, and my heart was beating so painfully that I could scarcely get my words out—"what do you mean? Am I to understand that if you had been Margaret—you would have chosen—otherwise?"

"I don't think that I should ever have chosen Desmond," she said, speaking very low and bending her head yet more and more over her needle-work.

"And you mean——? Oh, Constance — think. I'm so big, so ugly. I have passed the best years of my life in a French prison.

Grip

I would not dare—I would not presume—I could never hope——”

She flashed a look upon me and I caught the glint of tears in her eyes. Then she rose up and moved towards the entrance of the arbor.

“Must I make my meaning so very clear ?” she said in a tremulous voice.

She made as though she was about to turn away but I sprang after her and caught her back. “Do you realize all that you are saying ?” I exclaimed almost roughly. “You know what kind of a life I have had, but you don’t know what disappointment would be to me now. Don’t play fast and loose with me.”

She drew herself up and all the shyness died out of her manner. “You are taking me for my sister,” she said—then uttered a cry of self-reproach. “Oh, I ought not to have said that !” she exclaimed.

Possibly not, and yet it was that little slip of the tongue which gave her to me.

“You really mean it ?” I said incredulously after a little while.

“I really mean it,” she said, half saucily.

Constance

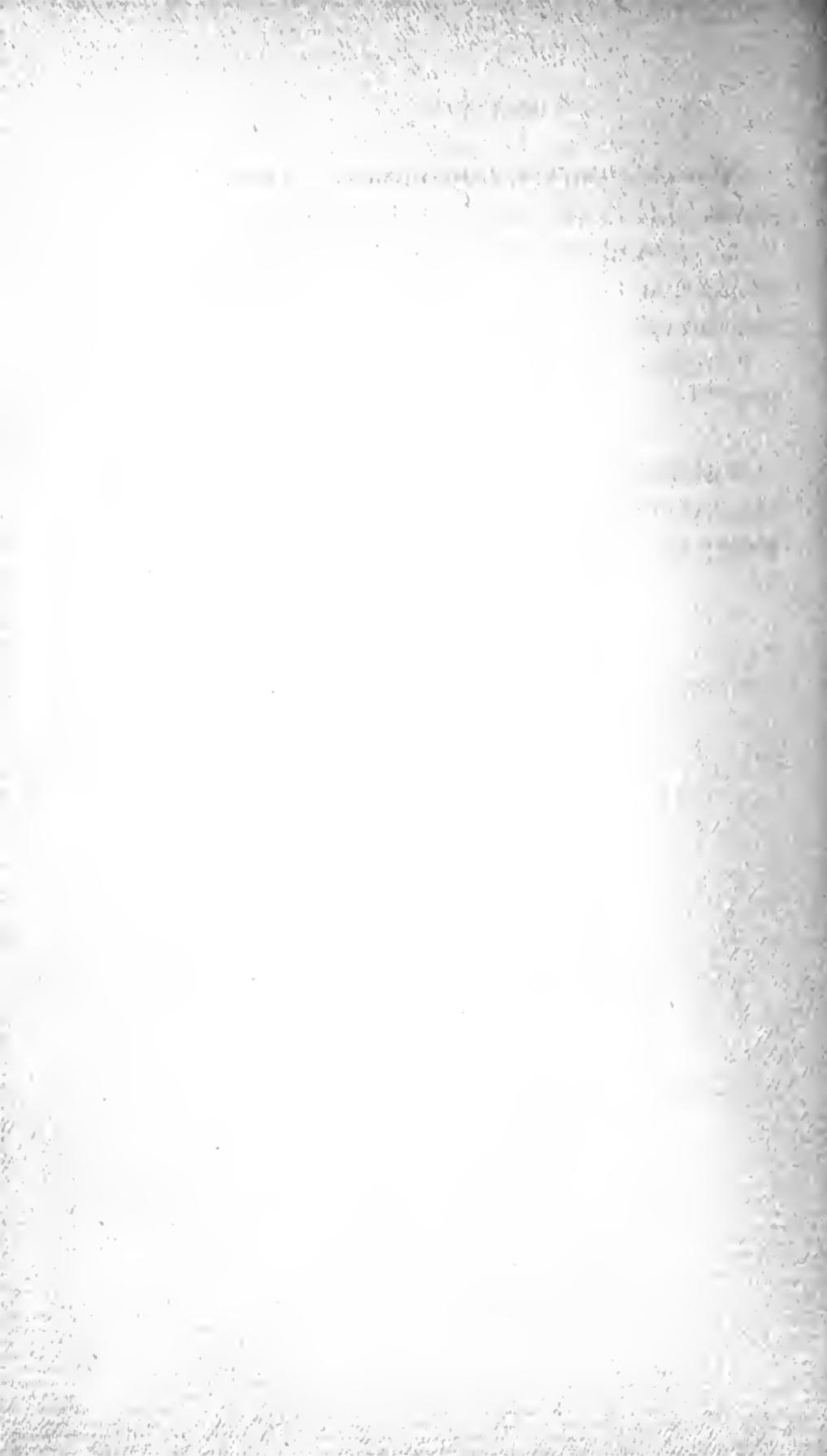
“But what can you see—in me?” I cried, scarce able to believe in my good fortune.

She looked at me, and in that moment all my doubts and fears died and were at rest forever.

“I see—*a man*,” she said. “I see—*you!*”

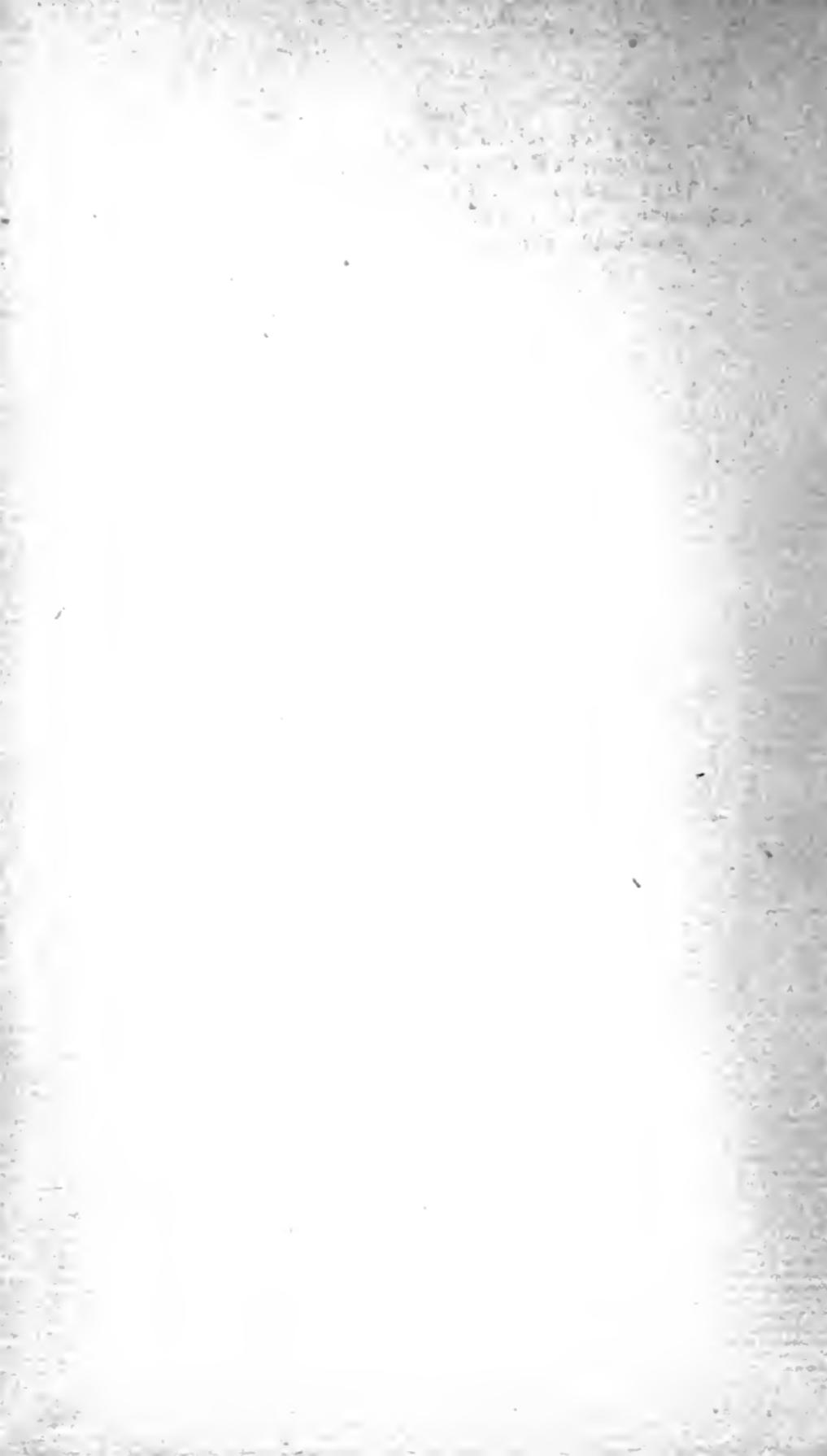
Within my wife’s wedding-ring two words are inscribed. They were graven there to please her and they are—“Charles Hyde.”

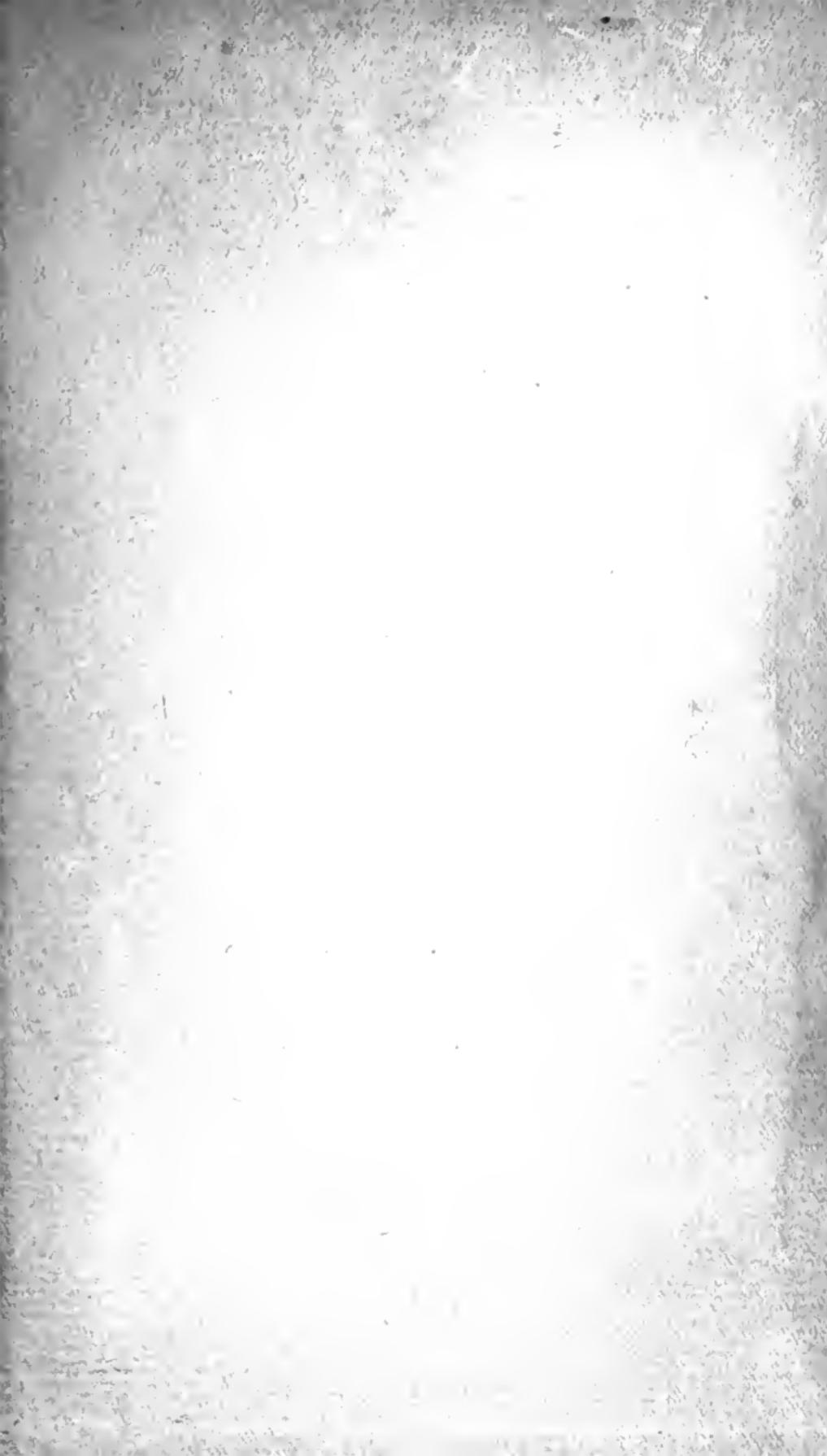
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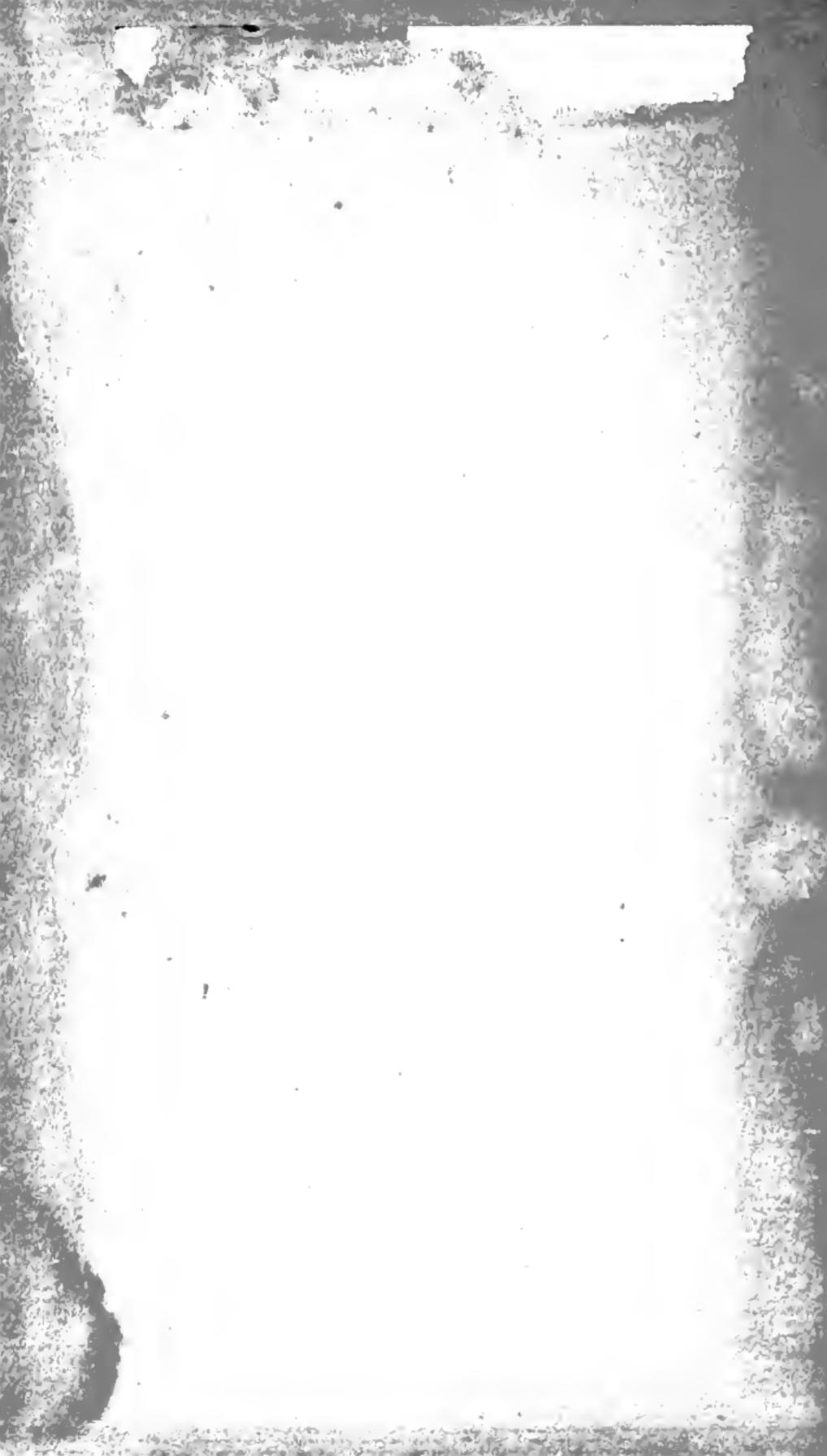


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